

Times of Shrewsbury

Special Edition



If you live in Shrewsbury—or even drive through town on Route 103—you know something of the legacy of tanning magnate John Porter Bowman. On the east side of the highway rises a larger-than-life size statue of Bowman bent in grief outside Laurel Glen Mausoleum. On the other side of the highway stands magnificent Laurel Hall built so Bowman could stay there and look out on the final resting place of his loved ones. Here is the story behind them.

Three miles north of Cuttingsville John Porter Bowman was born in 1816 at what is now called Pierce's Corner. His grandparents' Bowman Tavern there was favored by the Green Mountain Boys. At age 15 Bowman found work in a tannery in nearby Rutland starting at the entry level in the trade that would become his career. After additional years working at leather making factories in upstate New York he returned to Vermont. He settled in Cuttingsville and operated a tannery on Freeman Brook Road, between Route 103 and the railroad track, a spot known as "Tannery Crossing." These establishments were typically built outside village limits since tanning was an "odoriferous trade."

Shrewsbury showed its respect for Bowman in 1951 by electing him to be the Town's representative in Vermont's General Assembly. However, Bowman wanted to expand his business operations. In 1852 he bought an unfinished tannery and 6000 acres in Stony Creek, NY, and moved there. The site on Center Creek then had an uncompleted sawmill and just three houses, but plenty of needed natural resources. When the Civil War broke out, the tannery prospered as a major supplier of boots, saddles, and other leather products for

the Union Army. As Bowman's business grew, a company town grew around it. Over time Bowman built 16 houses for employee families and a 25-bed boarding house. Bowman had a grand residence, a prestigious office and a fine stable. Bowman was rich and well respected.

That success notwithstanding, Bowman was a grief-stricken man in 1880, following the deaths of his beloved wife Jennie and young daughter Ella. Their other child Addie had previously died at age four months. Bowman resolved to build a magnificent final resting place for them. Bowman first considered erecting this memorial in the family plot in the East Clarendon Cemetery, but the residents of Clarendon balked at his elaborate plan. Bowman then settled on the site in Cuttingsville, by the old village cemetery. Bowman named it Laurel Glen -- invoking the symbol of wealth, prosperity, and eternal glory. Construction began on the mausoleum that summer. The work was completed and the three caskets were interred in 1881.

As part of his grand design, Bowman also enlarged the cemetery and funded extensive improvements to its grounds, including an 800' cemetery wall with three gates, walks and carriage drives, shade trees, two fountains, and benches for contemplation. Bowman built a large greenhouse to provide flowers and shrubs. Then came the final piece -- the construction of a home across the road, where Bowman could stay and look out on Laurel Glen. Bowman named this mansion Laurel Hall. The National Register of Historic Places Registration Form summed it up: "Laurel Hall was built to be the summer residence of a man who had no family, yet commissioned a house to have four bedrooms in addition to two separate bedrooms for servants."

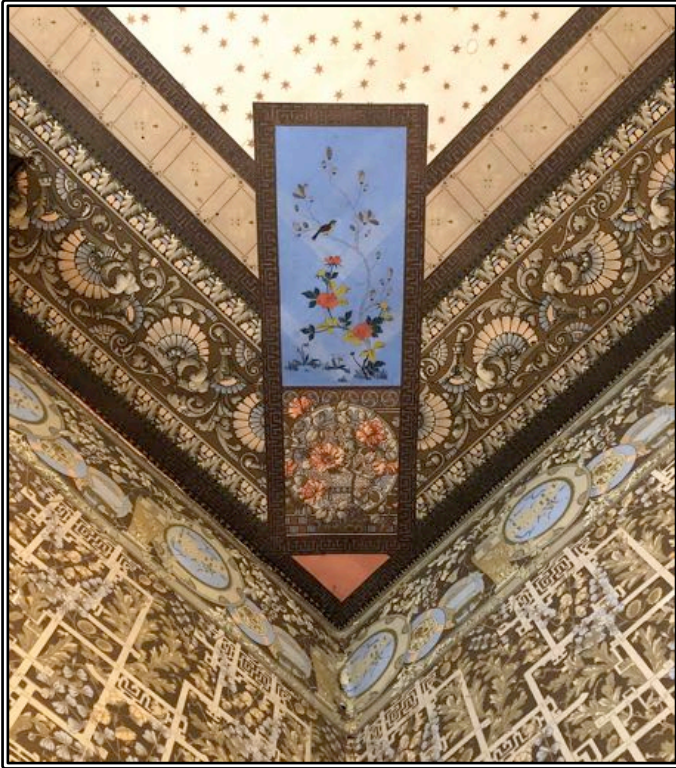
New York architect G. B. Croff, who was born in South Wallingford, Vermont, designed both the mausoleum and the mansion. Croff's work and designs were famous at the time and remain so to this day. Architecturally speaking,

(Continued on page 3)



Above: Branches of laurel leaves above the front door can also be seen in relief over many of the exterior windows of Laurel Hall, and the sign hangs above the front porch to greet visitors.

Left: The large newel post at the base of the cherry staircase has carved panels and faceted design in the Eastlake style.



CEILINGS and CARPET



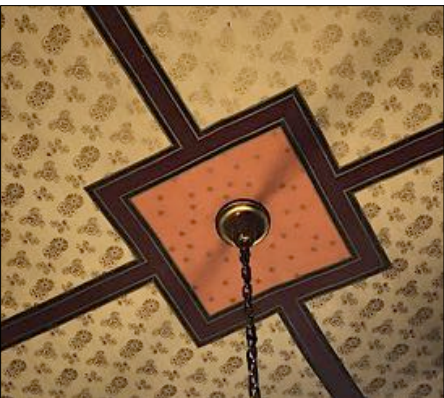
The transition of wall to ceiling is a visual feast for the eyes in many areas of the house.



Top left: Original 1882 wallpaper in Parlor Room features ceiling panels of small birds and orange flowers with leaves of green and yellow set on a light blue background. This view is looking up in one corner of the room.



Top right: Passageway on 2nd floor leading to servants quarters is original. (also on page 5).



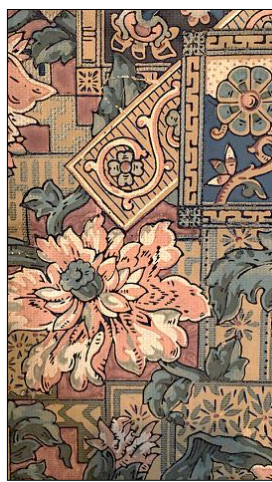
Left: In the grand entrance hallway the original wallpaper from 1882 features Anglo-Japanese design with Roman and Greek themes in the frieze on the ceilings and walls. The predominant colors are dark with tan and gold highlights, creating a contrast to the original interior trim painting of ashen pinks, tans, pale blues and black detailing. This combination of colors is repeated throughout both floors of the house.



Right top: The corner section of the original ceiling in the Music Room is painted pressed metal with a curved crown molding.

Right bottom: The original Brussels carpeting which was laid in 1892 is still in place in several rooms upstairs and downstairs in the private as well as the servant areas.





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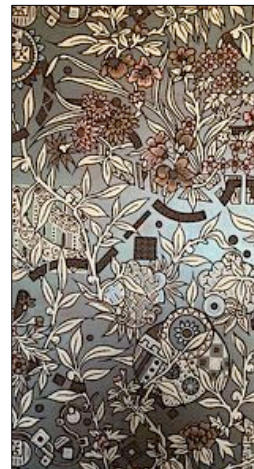
Laurel Hall is a large wood framed Queen Anne style house with Eastlake and Stick Style influence. There is a three-story tower above the main entrance doors, which open to an expansive central hallway. The adjacent front parlor, sitting room, music room and formal dining room all feature elaborate fireplaces, wallpaper, and fixtures. Grand floor-to-ceiling mirrors enlarge the hallways on the first two floors. A cherry staircase with paired windows of colored glass leads upstairs to the second floor and four bedrooms. Bowman's meditation room on the third floor of the tower overlooks the mausoleum where his family lay. Unlike most homes of the 1880's, Laurel Hall featured closets, hot and cold water, as well as electricity.



Descriptions of interior wall treatments from an October 31, 1882 *Rutland Herald* article reporting about the newly completed structure stated that "the mural decorations are extremely rich throughout, with paneled ceilings treated in befitting allegory, differing in design in every room in paneling, frieze and dado. The treatment of the woodwork blends in sweet accord with all the mural tints employed, and being in design quite fresh and quaint, it forms a striking feature in the whole, creating in the happy combination a soft, warm, dreamy air but seldom seen."



Laurel Hall and its related buildings are also important as an early example of a seasonal estate built by a wealthy "native son." The estate consisted of Laurel Glen (the mausoleum), Laurel Hall (the house), a caretaker's cottage, a conservatory (greenhouse), Icehouse, carriage barn, and landscaped grounds. Bowman vacationed at the house occasionally throughout the year and entertained friends and celebrities when in residence. Bowman retired to Laurel Hall in 1887. He was chronically ill in his final years and joined his family in Laurel Glen after his death on September 18, 1891.



A century ago, caretakers maintained the greenhouse behind the mausoleum, growing plants for the cemetery, and although it is not mentioned in Bowman's will, it is said that servants kept the dining room table set in Laurel Hall, in the event Bowman and his family returned. Bowman wanted the property maintained in perpetuity and left \$50,000 in his will to assist in its maintenance. The will was written on Christmas Day 1885 and left the property in trust, directing that a corporation be created to manage the same "for permanence." Vermont's General Assembly obliged, creating the Laurel Glen Cemetery Association of 1894, which has maintained the property since.



Managing a property for permanence is easier directed than done. In the 1930's and 1940's the trust funds became severely depleted, and in 1953 the furnishings were auctioned off. As time went on Laurel Hall was rented as a residence and housed the Haunted Mansion Bookstore. The last grand event was the Victorian Christmas Tour in 1994 in association with the Shrewsbury Historical Society. In 1983 Joan V. Stewart assumed the role of Superintendent and cared for the property for more than 35 years. The Laurel Glen Association trustees are currently exploring possibilities for the property. The property offers exciting opportunities as well as serious challenges. Just as John Porter Bowman honored his family, the Laurel Glen Association wishes to honor this unique historical property in our town.



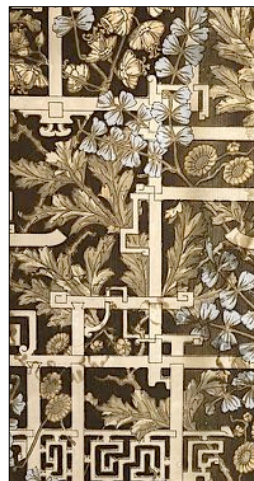
WALLPAPER

Wallpaper swatches from first and second floor rooms. Only three (see below) are original; the others are restorations that approximate original wallpaper and paint colors.

Top left: The original wallpaper in first and second floor hallways.

Bottom left: The original painted pressed metal with dado in Music Room.

Bottom right: The original wallpaper in Parlor with shades of tan and brown.





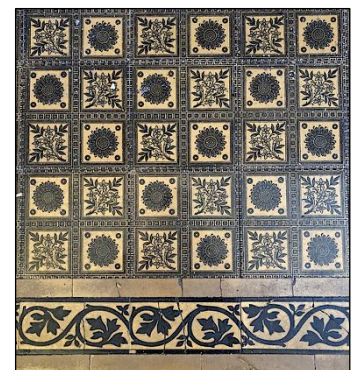
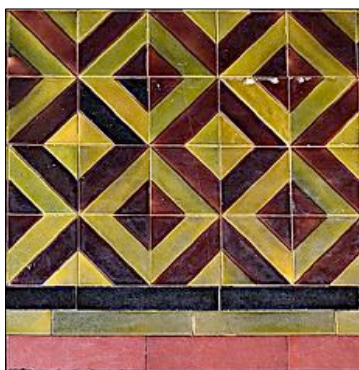
FIREPLACES

There are four formal rooms with 16' ceilings on the first floor of Laurel Hall: Sitting Room, Parlor, Music Room, and Dining Room. Each room has a wooden fireplace with ornate tiles surrounding the firebox and a hearth of geometric tiles.

Above left: The fireplace in the Sitting Room features a tall mantel of birch wood with turned spindles flanking a rectangular mirror supporting a tapered hood. The hearth features dark patterned tiles (lower left) of Eastlake designs. Blue and white floral tiles surround the firebox. The original Brussels carpeting is still on the floor of the room.

Above right: The Music Room (30' x 20') is the largest of the four rooms with walls and ceiling entirely in painted pressed metal with dado. The walls, crown molding and ceiling are of different patterns. Surrounding the fireplace are 17 tiles of scenes from Shakespeare (above center). The floor tiles of the Music Room fireplace (below right) are of the Eastlake design.

Although the fireplaces in the Parlor and Dining Room are of similar wooden design, the tiles around the firebox are more delicate while the hearth tiles (below center two photos) are a more geometric design.





Floor to ceiling mirrors create depth in access areas upstairs and downstairs.



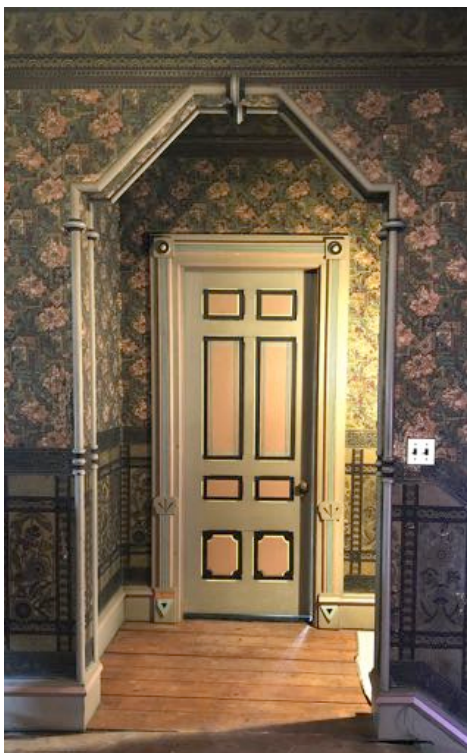
PASSAGES and DOORWAYS

Above: Brass interior door knobs, key plates, and hinges have raised Eastlake style design.

Below: Moldings with polychromatic paint schemes complement the wallpaper.



Upstairs hallway has original wallpaper and paint scheme.



Upstairs passageway features the same original wallpaper on the first floor.



The first floor grand hallway entrance has a central arch and side arches where classic statues were placed. The wallpaper is original.



WINDOWS



Above: At the top of the staircase is a Queen Ann style window. When the sun makes its western descent colored light fills both the main and 2nd floor hallways with shades of amber, purple and blue.

Left: The window in the third floor Meditation Room overlooks Laurel Glen.

Below: The window of amber, blue and pink panes is above the front entry door. The same geometric design is found above other exterior doorways and windows.



The Bowman Family

Addie L. Bowman: April 29, 1854--August 24, 1854
 Ella H. Bowman: October 30, 1856--June 25, 1879
 Jennie E. Bowman: March 15, 1824--January 28, 1880
 John P. Bowman: January 16, 1816--September 18, 1891

1840's: Bowman opened a tannery in an area known as "Tannery Crossing" south of Cuttingsville
 1849: Married Jennie E. Gates of Warren, New York

1851: Bowman elected to the Vermont State Legislature
 1852: Bowman opened a tannery in Stony Creek, NY

1854: Daughter, Addie, died at the age of four months

1879: Daughter, Ella, died in her young adulthood
 1880: Wife, Jennie, died

Laurel Hall Estate

1880-81: Laurel Glen Mausoleum and Cemetery wall built
 1881: Statue of John Bowman sculpted by Geovani Turini

1881-82: Laurel Hall and grounds built
 1882: Icehouse, Carriage Barn and Conservatory built

1930's & 1940's: Bad investments depleted the trust fund
 1953: Furnishings of the house were auctioned

1960: Featured in *Yankee Magazine*

1974: Featured in travel section of *The New York Times*

1998: Laurel Glen Mausoleum and Laurel Hall received National Register of Historic Places designation



Only a Glimpse

The estate of John P. Bowman is an expression of wealth and grief. Only a glimpse of the interior spaces can be imagined through the words and photos in this Special Edition. Sources used include:

- Last Will and Testament of John P. Bowman
- National Registry of Historic Places Registration Form
- *New York Times*, October 27, 1974
- *Rutland Herald*, October 31, 1882
- Shrewsbury Historical Society
Article by Marjorie Pierce, 1995
 Archive of brochures and news articles
- *Shrewsbury, Vermont: Our Town As it Was* by Dawn D. Hance
- *Times of Shrewsbury*, December 2020

LAUREL GLEN MAUSOLEUM

"Sacred to the memory of a sainted wife and daughters"

Laurel Glen Mausoleum is significant for representing late 19th century attitudes toward death and mourning. Bereavement was manifested in special mourning dress and etiquette, mementos of dead loved ones, and elaborate funerary art. Mourning the deaths of family members was especially important. Such visible expressions of mourning and grief are less comfortable by today's customs.

In 1880 Bowman was a grief-stricken man after the death of his wife Jennie and daughter Ella died in the same year; his daughter Addie had died in 1854 at age four months. Thus, Bowman resolved to build a magnificent final resting place for his family and commissioned noted New York architect G. B. Croff to design and build the mausoleum which incorporates Egyptian and Classical styles popular in the 19th century.

Displaying the attitude toward death during the period, the marble statue on the steps of the mausoleum of a grieving Bowman holds a top hat, cloak, gloves, key, and funeral wreath which was carved and installed while he was still alive. This prominent display on the mausoleum's front steps is unique in American funerary art.

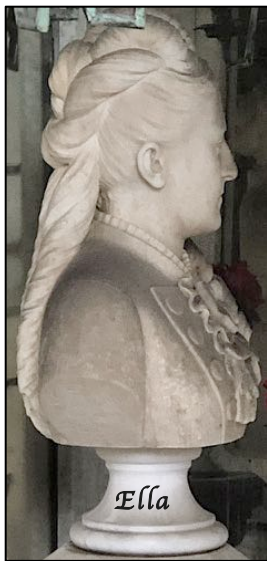
There are sculpted busts of the deceased, and ornate stonework around the crypts. Mirrors are positioned to make the room seem larger than it really is, and the ceiling is arched. The walls are built of 750 tons of granite, and the interior work was principally 50 tons of marble. The four caskets of the family members are stacked one above the other with Bowman the lowest followed by his wife Jennie, then Ella, and infant daughter Addie upper most.

Unlike most mausoleums, this one was built to be viewed, and in the summer of 1881 the mausoleum was visited by 10,000 people. A guest book was installed, and an usher was hired to guide visitors. It is one of the most elaborate mausoleums in Vermont.

The statue of Bowman and those of his family inside the mausoleum (shown here) were designed by New York City sculptor Giovanni Turini, who is best known for a statue of Garibaldi in Washington Square and a bust of Mazzini in Central Park, New York.

Today the Laurel Glen Association protects the statue of Bowman in winter with a specially built cover. When the statue is uncovered each spring and the gated doors allow viewing of the interior, visitors can be seen coming to fulfill Bowman's wish that the mausoleum be viewed and his grief be acknowledged.

*Laurel Hall and Laurel Glen articles by Barry Griffith
Photos and Layout by Chryl Martin*



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