The Oldest House in Key West, built in 1829, is located at 322 Duval Street. Tours of the house are free and it is open daily 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Closed Sunday and Wednesday.

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Our Mission: Celebrate and sustain Key West’s unique architecture, culture and history.

59th Annual 2018-19 Key West Home Tours™

The annual Key West Home Tours™ are one of the oldest and longest running home tours in America, with the first tour in 1960. Old Island Restoration Foundation (OIRF) conducts the tours and they are funded in part by our generous supporters. Each tour features lovely homes and gardens reflecting the varied tastes and originality of their owners.

Proceeds from the tours stay in our local community. Our historic preservation grant program provides financial assistance to projects of historical / architectural significance within the City of Key West. Scholarship assistance is made through Take Stock in Children, an award winning scholarship and mentoring program. In addition, funds are used to maintain the Oldest House Museum and Garden.

Bonus 6th Stop
Each of the four tours include five lovely homes and a bonus 6th stop where we feature a different historic inn/hotel. Learn the history and receive free drinks and nibbles too.

- December 28 and 29, 2018; 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm
- January 18 and 19, 2019; 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Optional Conch Tour Train transportation between homes. Limited seating must be reserved in advance.
- February 15 and 16, 2019; 10:00 am to 4:00 pm
- March 15 and 16, 2019; 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Go to www.keywesthometours.org for more information and tickets.
OLD ISLAND RESTORATION FOUNDATION

Key West’s Oldest House Newsletter

December 2018

Visitors From Around the World

Since our last Newsletter, we have been visited by people from every corner of the globe. In the last three months families who signed our visitor’s book were from 45 different countries including Egypt.

We also capture comments from people who toured The Oldest House. Some from the past Quarter are worthy of being proudly published here:

“Thank you for preserving our history, and offering it free to tourists”

“Delightful --- great docent. Thoroughly enjoyed the history”

“A wonderful hidden gem of Key West”

“Great place and such an informative guide”

“Super tour -- we all enjoyed the house and garden so much”

“Beautiful to see history still alive”

“Incredibly preserved; Thank You for what you do for the public”

“Very beautiful; it takes you to a new (old) place!”

“Lovely….great explanations”

“Like walking back in time, it’s so beautiful”

“Amazing place and lovely staff”

“Thanks for the great tour”

Proclamation for Rosemary

Rosemary Austin was responsible for saving The Oldest House from the wrecking ball. In the mists of time, much information about the Watlington family has been forgotten or simply lost. However, one date that should be indelibly written into the annals of Key West history, is the date The Oldest House was purchased for posterity by Rosemary Austin. She subsequently donated the building to the State of Florida in 1975, for permanent preservation as a Key West Museum.

OIRF is now in the process of working with City officials to issue a Proclamation in memory of her generous contribution which ensured the preservation of the building now known as “The Oldest House”.

Become an OIRF Supporter

Help Us Achieve Our Goals

Old Island Restoration Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1960 and dedicated to preserving and promoting the architecture and cultural heritage of Key West. Through private donations and memberships from individuals, business, and public agencies the Foundation is working to raise funds to preserve and maintain the Oldest House in south Florida, provide innovative programming, and provide grants for significant and worthy historical restoration projects in Key West.

There are three ways you can help.

Become a Member - Support us with an annual membership and enjoy membership benefits.

Cash Donation – Your donation will be used to maintain the Oldest House and further historic preservation in Key West.

Volunteer – Your time and talent can be utilized in a variety of ways. Become a docent at the Oldest House Museum on Duval Street and tell the story of Captain Watlington and his family who lived in the house in the 1800s. It’s a great opportunity to meet and talk with visitors from all parts of the world.

We welcome your participation! For more information about becoming a member or donating go to oirf.org/ join.

Follow Us On The Web

In addition to the information posted on our websites and included in each newsletter, we also use social media to disseminate historic preservation-related news, fun facts, press releases, photos of historic Key West places, and other items of interest to the community.

We have a variety of pages and feeds you can follow:

Websites
www.OIRF.org
www.KeyWestHomeTours.org
www.TheGardenattheOldestHouse.org
www.OldestHouseMuseum.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/OldestHouseandGardensKeyWest/

Twitter: www.twitter.com/KeyWestHomeTour

Pinterest: Oldest House and Gardens Key West
The Watlington Goblets

Sometime in the early 1800’s, perhaps as a romantic gesture to his new bride Emeline, Captain Francis Watlington took two coconut shells to New York’s premier silversmith, William G. Forbes. He asked that they be made into goblets.

Forbes turned the project over to Joseph and Teunis D. Dubois, rural silversmiths who made exquisite silver items to be sold in New York shops like Forbes’. They carefully carved coconut palm trees and pineapples into the shells. On the other side they carved the captain’s initials in such an elaborate, swirly pattern that a descendant had trouble recognizing the middle initial: “B” for Benjamin. The Dubois brothers polished the coconut shells until they gleamed. They added rims of silver, and set them onto silver stands. Alongside Forbes’ hallmark, they proudly stamped their own pseudo-hallmarks on the silver bases.

The newlyweds took the goblets with them when they sailed south to Key West, where Emeline’s father had a few wrecking vessels; it was the promise of a new life in a frontier territory which must have dazzled their imaginations. The goblets took pride of place in their newly-built home, which eventually became “The Oldest House In Key West”. Although they had nine daughters together, Francis and Emeline apparently became estranged over the years. After the captain sailed north to Mobile, to fight for the south during the Civil War, he never returned to Emeline.

Emeline died in 1881. In August 1936, descendant Sallie Sawyer wrote to her cousin, Edward Howe II: “Captain Watlington wrote from Mobile to Aunt Sarah, telling her that since her mother had died he gave her full authority over, and full possession of the household and personal belongings……., and she was to do for Aunt Lillie and she was to give her whatever she wished, especially the goblets…….”

Sarah and Lillie were two of Francis’ and Emeline’s surviving daughters. Lillie was the youngest and only unmarried daughter; she wanted Edward to have the goblets. In a later letter of the same year, Sallie wrote: “Please don’t give the goblets up to anyone, but enjoy them, and hand them down to your children and their children after them.”

In February 1941, Edward wrote to his son, Edward Howe III: “I am glad the coconut cups arrived in good condition….. the cups stood on the mantel in the house as long as anybody could remember, and were the family’s most prized possession. When I went to see your grandmother in 1885, I was shown the cups and was told that as I was the oldest male descendant, they would come to me eventually……”

The goblets remained in the Howe family for 64 more years. In April 2005, Robert and Susan Howe Hutchins travelled from Massachusetts to present the goblets to The Oldest House. They donated the goblets on their behalf, and also two other great-granddaughters, Barbara Howe Philips, and Florence Howe Murat. “These goblets have been in my family for generations”, said Susan. “We feel it is time that they return to the home where they belong.”

Often overlooked by visitors, the goblets now stand in the old corner cabinet in the dining room, testament to young love lost and a carefully preserved heritage.

Are you a member of OIRF?

Through private donations and memberships from individuals, business, and public agencies we are working to raise funds to preserve and maintain the Oldest House in south Florida, provide innovative programming, and provide grants for significant and worthy historical restoration projects in Key West. You can help us make it happen here: www.oirf.org/join
Art Restoration Grant Progress

Work is progressing on our Art Restoration Project, funded by the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys, and is proceeding in two phases...

Phase 1: Photographic Work and Painting Restoration
This phase is nearing completion. Originals of significant family photographs have been enhanced and copies placed in original Victorian oval wood frames.

The much faded originals have been cataloged and stored in archival boxes. One major item still to be completed for phase 1 is the marine print of The Great Western Steamship. Depending on cost, the Board will make a decision as to the appropriateness of this large print and whether or not it should be de-accessed and possibly auctioned at one of our upcoming Garden Events.

Our Tropical Garden:
The perfect setting for your special event
Key West’s Oldest House Museum and Garden offers the perfect setting for your memorable event, whether it is a grand, lavish affair or a perfect private ceremony. This secluded paradise is ideal for weddings, vow renewals and commitment ceremonies; birthdays and anniversaries; and special events for organizations and companies.

A private setting in the heart of historic Old Town. Our garden can accommodate an elegant and extravagant event or a small intimate occasion. We can serve up to 120 seated diners or 300 for a cocktail party.

The facility includes our large garden with lawn, brick pathways, pavilion, clean modern restrooms, and magnificent mature tropical foliage. Tables, chairs and linens are available. For more information call 305.294.9501, e-mail admin@oirf.org or go to www.TheGardenAtTheOldestHouse.org.

Phase 2: Original Restoration and Cleaning
We have made large strides on this activity, now that phase 1 is almost completed. The expert who is working on this is Tom Joris, a well-known local artist. It is estimated that phase 2 will be completed during the first Quarter of 2019. Only one significant painting is waiting to go through major restoration; this is of Emma Thompson, one of the founding members of OIRF.

OIRF 2018-19 Event Calendar
Key West Home Tours™ Tickets
December 28-29, 3 pm – 6 pm
January 18-19, 3 pm – 6 pm
February 15-16, 10 am – 4 pm
March 15-16, 10 am – 4 pm
Conch Shell Blowing Contest
Saturday, March 2, 12 noon at the Oldest House