

# Social Register Locator & Observer



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## Great American Treasures

by Genevieve Wheeler Brown

**W**HETHER READING the latest bestseller by David McCullough, listening to a podcast hosted by noted historian Jon Meacham, or viewing the musical *Hamilton* with their families, Americans are exploring, now more than ever and through a variety of media, how America came to be. We are taking stock of our country's past and reflecting on the lessons learned to redefine what it means to be an American today. There is no better time than now for all Americans to have access to the places and objects that have been witness to the evolution of our country. Nothing informs us more than the first-hand knowledge derived from visiting the

historic properties that tell our collective story as a nation.

The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA) has organized a new museum alliance that includes over 60 historic places that give context to who we are and how America came to be. This alliance also incorporates fine and decorative art collections, as well as gardens across the United States and in England. Following in the footsteps of the founding Dames, it was within the organization of the NSCDA that, in 2013, members identified the evolving needs in historic preservation, the importance of sharing the Dames' legacy and the great opportunity to support the interests of Americans with a

new concept: Great American Treasures: NSCDA Museum Alliance.

Its recently launched website, [www.greatamericantreasures.org](http://www.greatamericantreasures.org), provides open access to inspire in-person as well as virtual visits to these historic places. Visiting the website, one can learn about individual historic properties such as Sulgrave Manor, George Washington's ancestral home in England. The website introduces visitors to new historical narratives and re-examines the many thematic threads that are woven throughout the fabric of American history.

Great American Treasures is a gift to the nation from the NSCDA, the women's patriotic and historic preservation





Above: Dumbarton House, built in 1799, is a Federal period house museum in Washington, DC. The NSCDA purchased the house in 1928 and, following restoration, opened it to the public as museum in 1932.

Previous page: The garden at Sulgrave Manor was designed in the 1920s by renowned and outspoken architect Sir Reginald Blomfield. There are beautiful views across the surrounding countryside, which is owned by the Sulgrave Manor Trust.




Above: Anna Ferguson Duff, New York Dame and President of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America (2016-2020) at Arlington Cemetery.

Below: Philadelphia, PA Headquarters of the Women's Centennial Executive Committee, 903 Walnut Street. Mrs. E.D. Gillespie receiving reports from sub-committees.



organization that owns or supports more than 90 historic properties and collections of fine and decorative art. The NSCDA is second only to the National Park Service in its stewardship of historic buildings nationwide. From its inception, the NSCDA understood the importance of conserving the past to help us gain a greater understanding of ourselves and to shape our future. Many of these historic places are now part of Great American Treasures, such as Dumbarton House, a Federal hilltop brick home and garden in Georgetown that famously served as Dolly Madison's refuge as she fled Washington DC, during the War of 1812. Today, Dumbarton House plays a dual role as the national headquarters of the NSCDA, as well as a house museum hosting visitors and Dames from around the country.

Led by a dynamic group of Dames, including NSCDA National President Anna Ferguson Duff, Sally Meyer Connelly, Anne Burkhardt Burnett, Dr. Jean Gray McGinnis, and Katherine Taylor Cammack, the NSCDA knew that museums working together and sharing collective knowledge can only make historic properties better for the people who visit them. Furthermore, by creating an alliance with a mutual platform, museums can share information, conversations, resources, and network with peers and professionals across the country. Unveiled to coincide with the 125th anniversary of the founding of the NSCDA, the initial plans for Great American Treasures were shared publicly at the annual meeting of the American Association for State and Local History in September of 2017. Great American Treasures is an inspirational next step for the future of historic preservation, and continues to grow and engage Americans as our country's story continues to unfold. 

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“Sedgwick, you’re in!”

