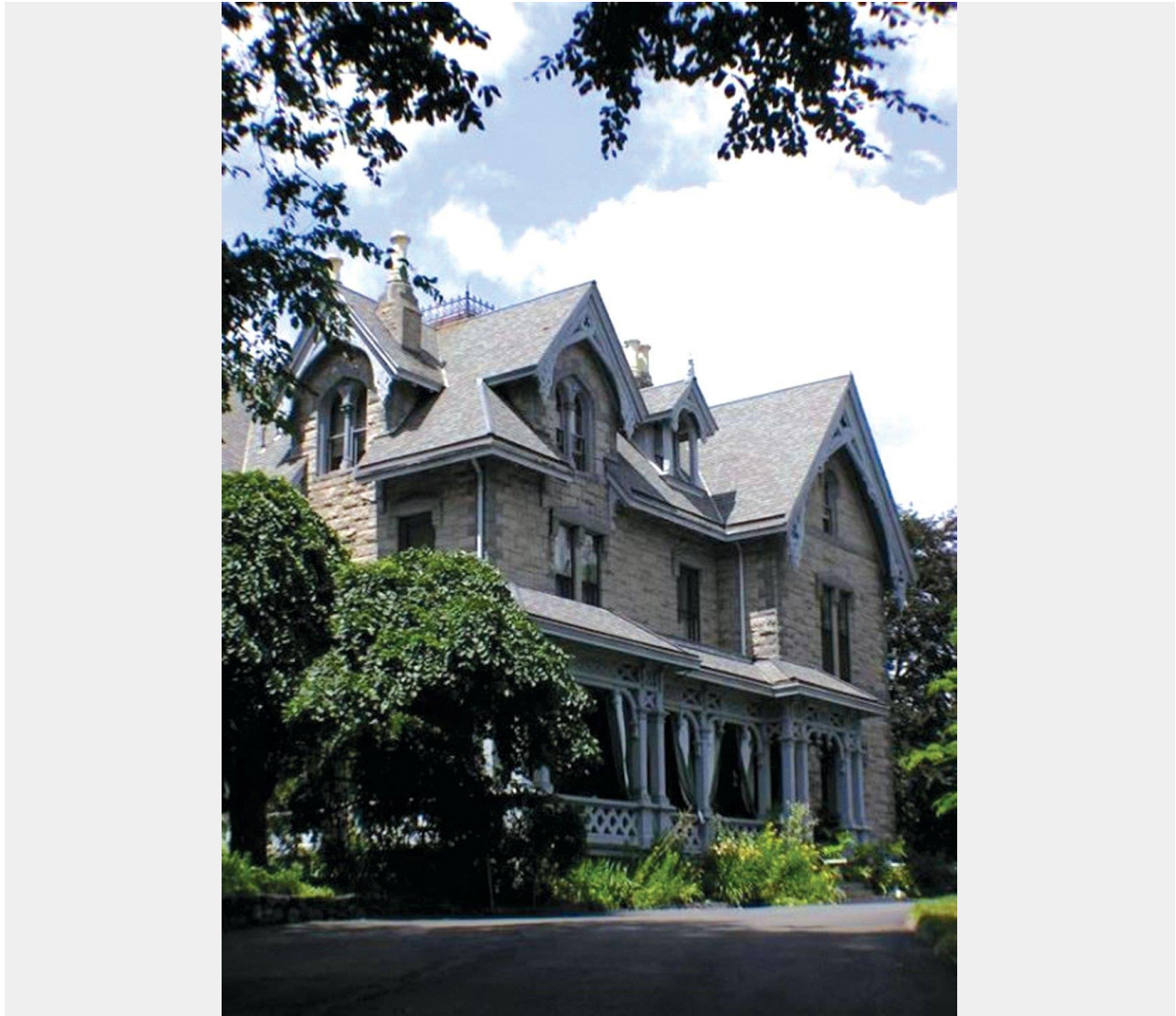


NEWS

## Clouds Hill House Museum makes appearance in HBO's 'The Gilded Age'



Posted Tuesday, February 1, 2022 9:41 pm

**By EMMA BARTLETT**

Warwick's Clouds Hill Museum captured the attention of the producer and director of HBO's new series "The Gilded Age"; it is the only Rhode Island site outside of Newport that was used for the series. In this nine-episode season, Clouds Hill Museum will likely make an appearance in episode three, which airs on HBO on Feb. 7.

Clouds Hill was built between 1871 and 1877 and gifted to Elizabeth Ives Slater Reed as a wedding present from her father, William S. Slater. The house has been passed down four generations and in 2000, its doors opened to the public. Anne Holst is the museum president and curator – as well as the latest family descendant. With a variety of textile collections, furnishings, family articles dating back to the 1870s and more, the museum's goal is to "preserve this iconic Rhode Island property, including its buildings, collections and open space to educate future generations."

The story is set in New York and Newport and begins in 1882 with Marian Brook moving to New York City after the death of her father. Going to live with her two aunts, Marian is accompanied by Peggy Scott, an aspiring writer. From here, Marian will be exposed to a world on the brink of the modern age. "The Gilded Age" was produced by Julian Fellowes – the creator of Masterpiece's "Downton Abbey."

Steven Feinberg, the executive director of the Rhode Island Film & Television Office, first learned about Clouds Hill Museum about 18 years ago when the Rhode Island native moved back home after working in LA. For fun, he took bus tours that showed people different sites around the Ocean State with one of the excursions bringing him to Clouds Hill Museum in 2004. He made a note to remember the location and its unique setting became the recommendation for "Nos4A2" and "The Gilded Age."

In 2019, location scouts reached out to Holst and Cabral about filming part of "The Gilded Age" at Clouds Hill. The hope was to film sometime in May or June of 2020, but the onset of the pandemic caused plans to come to a halt. The crew rescheduled for late-February of 2021 where the actors partook in two days of filming and experienced true New England weather – with rain the first day and snow the next. With a couple hundred people on site for the filming, 10 to 12 actors worked on set.

The filming took place in the parlor, library, entryway and staircase and is used to portray the Morris house which is located on Fifth Avenue in the show; Mr. and Mrs. Morris' bedrooms were filmed in the Newport mansions.

“When you talk about a film day in production, there’s no such thing as an eight hour day,” said Wayne Cabral, museum director.

Cabral said on day two of filming, the taping finished around midnight. He also mentioned that the filming was the least time consuming aspect and that prepping the set took the most work – in this case four to five days.

While the museum allowed the crew to use the available furniture and items that were in the museum, Holst explained that the head set designer sourced items from local antique shops in East Greenwich and North Kingstown. Almost all the parlor’s furniture was removed, along with the library’s desk and curtains – which were disintegrating. The museum’s furniture was carefully bubble wrapped and any items in the desk drawers were individually wrapped and kept in place. The items were brought to a storage unit that “The Gilded Age” paid for.

Since producers wanted to remove the curtains from the parlor and library, Holst negotiated to have the replacements costing \$10,000 left with the museum after the filming. Cabral and Holst educated themselves on contract negotiations through a national trust booklet on movie filming and house museums. Other preparations for the show included plasterwork, wallpaper touch ups and cleaning the chimney so a fire could be lit – all of which the crew paid for. Additionally, the museum received compensation for letting the series film at the site.

As for the amount of money that goes into a series like “The Gilded Age,” Feinberg said it’s many millions of dollars.

“Authenticity is paramount,” said Feinberg, mentioning how the costumes were hand drawn, handmade and used colors of that time period. While there is so much depth built into the characters’ stories, an exceptional amount of work goes into the craft of authentically portraying the surroundings – whether it be the buildings, furniture or costumes.

Holst said one aspect that impressed her were the strict Covid testing policy that required the crew of more than 100 to be tested every other morning. The tests were driven to New Jersey, and individuals received results that night – letting them know if they could be on set the following day. During the time of filming, the museum was closed for tours. Holst said this timing worked well since they did not receive as many visitors during the colder months.

Cabral was directly involved with the production and had one of the film crew's two-way radios that allowed him to be in constant communication with the crew. He supervised anything that had to be moved in the museum and the crew had to get permission from him or Holst for any changes.

Aside from filming, the crew and actors spent more time on site than usual.

“Because of Covid restrictions they had to do a lot of things on site that they normally wouldn't have done,” said Holst.

Normally, the crew rented a hall or location in the area where they could park trailers and shuttle and bus everyone back and forth. Because it would have taken so long to bus everyone out to eat, the crew set up a semi-permanent tent with a wooden floor next to the house.

While it may seem glamorous to be part of a set, there a lot of wear and tear that goes into being the host location – especially to the grounds. Due to the winter weather, Clouds Hill's driveway was heavily sanded and salted, which affected some of the land. Additionally, with trailers going up a driveway made for cars, they often wheeled onto the grass and four tents that were housed on the property did some damage.

But of course, there are perks to hosting a set – such as being extras in the film. While Holst and Cabral did not get to be in “The Gilded Age,” Clouds Hill has been the site of other movies including “Midnighters,” “Johnny & Clyde” and “NOS4A2” and were extras in two of those movies.

Holst and Cabral are unsure if “The Gilded Age” will return to Clouds Hill, but if the opportunity allows for it, they are excited to open their doors again. After all, the show's producer and director loved the museum's dining room and butler's pantry, so there might be a future opportunity there.

