

Burgwin, Bellamy and Latimer house museums work together

Written by Allen, Joy

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By Justin Williams Pope, ☐ StarNews Staff

“The collaboration can only benefit tourists as well as better promote each home.” -- Gareth Evans, Bellamy Mansion Museum

WILMINGTON -- The Burgwin-Wright House & Gardens at Third and Market streets has watched over downtown since 1770 and is the only Wilmington house from the Colonia era open to the public. Just up the street at Fifth Avenue and Market Street is the grand antebellum period Bellamy Mansion Museum. While many would say the houses are similar, they have very different stories to tell.

“Our houses and properties are remarkably different but they complement each other in many ways,” said Christine Lamberton, director at the Burgwin-Wright House. She says her property is unique because it tells the story of the Colonial period.

Gareth Evans, director of the Bellamy Mansion Museum, agrees that the Bellamy, built just before the Civil War, began has its own unique story to tell.

But both agree that together, the museums are stronger. And for the last decade now, tourists can buy a three-way ticket to see these historic venues, all within walking distance of one another.

“We are quite fortunate in Wilmington to have three sustaining historic homes,” says Lamberton.

The third home on that ticket is the historic Latimer House, operated by the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society. It's just up Third Street from Burgwin-Wright.

Rachel Rhine, manager of operations at the Latimer House, echoed Lamberton, saying, “The

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Bellamy and the Burgwin-Wright House have been wonderful partners and supportive of the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society.”

“I feel we are stronger together,” she added.

Evans believes that Wilmington is doing a much better job these days of marketing itself and that helps the historic homes as well as downtown.

“The collaboration can only benefit tourists as well as better promote each home. Visitors can start at one and move to the next,” Evans said.

And while visitors get to see the beautiful historic homes, they also get to see their many differences.

“At Bellamy, we tell the story of the Bellamy family but we do not have the house full with furniture and such,” Evans said.

Instead, the museum focuses on the design of the mansion as well as the restoration process of the main house and the restored slave quarters on the back side of the property.

In contrast, the Burgwin-Wright House is fully furnished with Colonial era fixtures. Lamberton said that about 10 percent of the home’s furnishings belonged to the Burgwin family itself.

The house was built on the foundation of the original city jail, a popular feature of the tour.

The Latimer house focuses on the Victorian era.

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“While this house was built in 1852 it was owned by one family, and during the height of the Victorian era was when the house was very active,” Rhine said.

The houses have big plans for 2018. While continuing their collaboration with tickets, the houses host a number of events independently such as art shows and lecture series.

Rhine, who only recently started her job at the Latimer House, said there will be more coming soon about future events there and involving the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society.

Evans said 2018 will be a big year at the Bellamy as Preservation North Carolina, the Raleigh-based organization that owns the museum, will hold its annual conference there in the fall.

Burgwin-Wright, owned by the National Society of Colonial Dames of America, is in the middle of a three-phase extensive restoration project.

Lamberton said this is an area where the houses can collaborate.

“The houses are so old so it takes a certain kind of artistry to help keep them looking to the period,” she said, adding that the Burgwin-Wright and Bellamy houses often use the same resources when work needs to be done.

“Many historic homes have disappeared,” Evans said. “It’s our jobs to help keep them alive, and when you have collaboration such as ours, it works.”

“It’s not competitive, it’s complementary,” said Lamberton.

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