1928

The Black Mansion, Ellsworth, Maine

Mrs. Axel Eliason

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory

Part of the History Commons

This Monograph is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History Documents by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.
THE BLACK MANSION
ELLSWORTH, MAINE
(Bequest of George Nixon Black 1928)

The Black House at Ellsworth, Maine, with a history from 1802 to 1928 and occupation by one family only, presents a moving picture of American life having no parallel.

The many treasures and beautiful things which are seen by visitors deserve this record of them. It is here presented in the form of repeating the experience of those who have the good fortune to be shown over the house by Mrs. Axel Eliason who has had charge of it both for Mr. Black in his lifetime and for the ensuing years.

Below is the picture of MARY (COBB) BLACK'S CAR-RIAGE.
THE BLACK MANSION
ELLSWORTH, MAINE

LIBRARIES
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE
AT ORONO

State of Maine Collection
RAYMOND H. FOGLER LIBRARY
GIFT OF
Mr. James B. Vickery
PREFACE

In this pamphlet the reader is taken through the Black House by Mrs. Axel Eliason who has had charge of the house both for the late George Nixon Black who gave it to the public and for the ensuing years.

This preface explains how the Black House came to be and then turns the reader over to Mrs. Eliason.

William Bingham, a Philadelphia millionaire, bought two and one-half million acres east of the Penobscot, paying Massachusetts ten cents per acre. He also bought from the French owner the eastern half of Mount Desert Island.

After these purchases he was represented by a land agent and the latter was, naturally, the most powerful and important man east of the Penobscot valley during the first half of the nineteenth century. The first agent of all was General Cobb, one of Washington's generals. His daughter Mary married an Englishman, John Black, who succeeded him and founded a family. General Cobb picked out the very spot where this house now stands on the slope gently rising from the Union River, then having a fine view of Mount Desert not hidden by trees. There the Blacks lived. Upon the death of the last in 1928 it became the property of the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations in trust for the public.

Twelve years before his death this last Mr. Black placed the house in charge of Mrs. Axel Eliason. The most fortunate among the visitors are even today shown through the house by her. Other guides are well trained in her story. This pamphlet presents it even more fully than she is able to tell it to each visitor.

RICHARD W. HALE,
Chairman of the Committee in
Charge of the Black House
MRS. ELIASON, THE CARETAKER IN CHARGE, IS SUPPOSED TO BE SPEAKING.

You see we are in a hallway which divides the office on the left of the entrance from the house on the right. See how the latter has a very beautiful ornamented front door of its own. At this stand-up desk you will please register that we may have a record of your visit. It is the only piece of furniture in the house which was not here in the time of the Blacks. Nothing has been added or subtracted although not all the things we have are shown.

When this house was built there was no business district. Indeed there was no city of Ellsworth. John Black did business in this room. Here on your right is the vault which in early days was the safe place against fire. It is full of documents and papers of all kinds. Colonel John Black never sent out a business letter that he did not copy in his own writing, and this vault is full of such copies. Some of the most interesting of them describe how the Colonel weathered that great depression in the prosperity of the United States. You will guess that I mean the depression of the 1830's and not the more recent one.

Here I say a general word about all the chairs and furniture which I shall be showing you. We doubt if we have much of anything that was brought in after 1850. But although the house and the Black and Cobb families residence in Ellsworth date back to around 1800, they brought older furniture with them, family possessions. Some pieces, we think, as early as 1650. And even after 1850 Mr. George Nixon Black added whatever was necessary to make the house comfortable without changing its characteristic features. For instance, the garden was laid out over again after 1900.

About chairs, in this house there are more than seventy chairs and each one is worth careful examination. Here in the office notice the old Windsor chairs and remember that they started making that type of chair about 1770. Here at the left as you enter the office is the Bible chest, a very early piece of furniture, dating back to the first half of the 1600's. The great Mr. Wallace Nutting has made a picture of this chest for his records and considers it of great value. Other experts agree with him. There are very few like it. People tell us that $5,000 would not be an unreasonable price for it. Here, next to it, is a Queen Anne highboy of curly maple. Notice the top. We call it a bonnet top. And notice the trimming, the torches.
Over on the other side of the door, to the right of it, is this Chippendale secretary. Inside of this piece of furniture are the very household bills which the last Mr. Black put away there. Elsewhere in the house I could show you how Colonel Black, the first of the line, preserved his bills. We have most of the bills of all of the generations that have been paid from this house.

This sofa is what is called Empire, or an Empire piece. That refers to the period during which the first Napoleon was Emperor and to its influence on furniture, including decoration and shapes.

Compare it with this chest which is what we call Jacobean. You will hear that word used about English furniture of the 1600’s even if it does not quite date back to James the First, or came along a little later while the influence of the styles in fashion under James the Second was still effective. The carving on this chest is the rose pattern. That indicates the influence of the Tudors, one of whose emblems was the rose.

The stuffed peacock over by the far window actually lived on this place. It was always the pride of the Blacks that they kept beautiful birds and animals here. Even after the death of Mr. George Nixon Black we tried to keep on with live peacocks. But the winters were severe and the peacocks were not rugged enough so, for the present, we are giving up in despair. Sometime when the Black House is richer we intend to try again. So we hope to see a pair of beautiful birds as part of the ornaments of the lawn, and meanwhile the house contains two which actually lived and died here.

The alabaster vase is worthy of your notice.

Chairs wherever you go in this house will always be as various as they are interesting. There are seven different kinds of Windsor chairs. I will run off the names now and you can watch for them as we go along:—fan back, oxbow back, curved back, braced back, saddle seat, Sheraton, and old Salem. Another thing about our chairs is that a good many of them have the names of the makers in the seat. Among those I have noticed in the house are chairs made by S. H. Horton of Salem, by E. B. Tracy, and by Dunn.

This room is heated by a Franklin stove. Notice the drum on top which gives out a lot of extra heat. This stove is the invention of Benjamin Franklin.

Now we come back to the front hall which, as you see, divides the office from the private home, also supplying
a way out to the back and into the garden and to the barns.

In this hall at the right of the entrance door and at the
left of the beautiful fanlight interior door I show you
General David Cobb's case containing case bottles and
glasses. Mr. George Nixon Black told me that General
Cobb, when he travelled, often took this chest with him.
We know that for some years he lived at George Washing-
ton's Mt. Vernon and he probably had it there. Think
what interesting stories this chest could tell of the places
it has been to and the people who have enjoyed the con-
tents of those bottles and glasses and admired their orna-
mentation and beauty. See how it opens up twice. First at
the top and then lower down with two complete tiers of
glassware.

Out of this chest I hold up and show to you a little
slip of paper with marks on it. There are many of these
throughout the whole house. About fifty years ago, long
before I came here, Mr. Black wrote out, with regard
to each piece or place in the house, the things he remem-
bered and the things he had been told, and all through
the house we have the advantage of these little marked slips
which are durable records of our information.

Also in this hall I show you a New England chest of
light oak, probably made about 1770 somewhere on the
North Shore of Massachusetts. And a Sheraton sofa of
about 1790. And a piece which deserves the name of
Jacobean. It could be used for a number of things. In this
hall are four chairs of a set of twelve. The other eight are
in the dining-room. These are Queen Anne chairs.

Observe the glass in the door and frame which sepa-
rate the dwelling from the hall. The muntins (that is the
accurate name for pieces that separate one pane of glass
from another) are not of wood, which would be the case
today, but of lead. The little roses which decorate this
glass are also of lead. And this glass reminds me to warn
you that as you go through the house you will do well to
admire all the windows. There are very few, if any, re-
placements and it is the original glass which was put in
when the house was built and when the glassmakers did
not produce as slick a surface as they do today. Certainly
the old glass produces a much more beautiful effect. It
is often convex or curved or irregular.

Do not delay in this long corridor hall which runs from
the interior entrance door clear through to the opposite
wing. I will show you the long hall presently, but now turn
immediately to the right and begin with the two great
living-rooms. This end is more of a parlor or drawing-
room. The other end is the dining-room.
Begin with this fireplace here on the right. There are nine open fireplaces in the house, and this one and the one at the far end are of black marble. We believe that the marble itself came from quarries outside of Philadelphia well-known for their fine marble and owned by a family named Jacoby. Not long ago we had a visit from someone who knew Mr. Edward Jacoby, the last of that line. We are told that that marble business dated back to the year 1700, and that this very Mr. Jacoby has a mantelpiece like this one. We are told that at the time this house was being built the quarry was at the famous Valley Forge and the marble cutting works were at Philadelphia, probably on Market Street near Twentieth. The Jacobys are the only firm that had this colored marble and controlled the quarry. On the mantelshelf I call your attention to the individual firescreens. Remember that this house was built long before the days of furnaces. We got our furnace much later. At first all the heat had to come from these generous fireplaces and there must have been heaping fires. The constant heat radiating out at people's faces must have been very trying to the skin, and individual face screens were part of the fireplace furniture. Then there were standing screens, also.

On the mantelshelf see this pair of lovely lamps with prisms of crystal glass and real gold leaf. These were made in London for a Boston firm and they belonged to General David Cobb.

Below, look at the fireset; andirons, shovel, and tongs. Among the things which Mr. George Nixon Black told me and recorded on his slips of paper, was that these belonged to the famous General Knox. That general was also a land agent in Maine farther to the west, with a beautiful house in Thomaston. His house did not survive and they have now built a replica of it.

General and Mrs. Cobb were good friends of General and Mrs. George Washington. Now I show you this miniature of Washington by Peale. It is painted on ivory. When Washington said good-by to his generals he quietly handed this miniature to General Cobb, who was comparatively wealthy and did not need financial help. To other generals and aides-de-camp General Washington gave financial aid, but no miniature.

Over in this corner I show you a table which was made in Florence, Italy. The top is of marble and the different marbles come from all over the world. The base of the table is of the pattern which is associated with the famous cabinet-maker, Duncan Phyfe. Probably the top was
brought home when one of the Blacks travelled in Italy and the base of the table made to fit it.

See on this table this copper box with porcelain cast on the outside of the copper. That came from Battersea in England and goes by that name. It is a rare and beautiful piece and unusually large for the Battersea work.

Then the next piece is what they call cloisonne, and it has a Roman lamp, the name for which is lucerna. Talking of these pieces reminds me that much of what I know about this house came to me from Mr. Harold Pitman. He is not of kin to the Blacks but there was a close friendship and coming along in the generation after Mr. Black he is the person now alive who was most familiar with the house in the time of its last owners. Occasionally we have a pleasant visit from him and one day he came in and sat down in this chair and told me of his own travels down the Nile River in Egypt in the year 1906. There he took this picture and that is how it came to be part of the furnishings of this room.

Now take an interest again in that question of chairs. Here are six mahogany Chippendale chairs. There are six of the same set in the hall. Across the hall is the little library and sitting-room. In that there are five more chairs of this set.

This table also belonged to General Cobb and is called a pier-table. That word “pier” refers to the part of the structure of a building between two windows which supports things. It is the same word as the pier of a bridge. And in furniture there are pier tables. They often stand under pier glasses of a shape suitable to go between two windows.

Here on the wall these lovely pictures are not oil or water-colour, but embroidered in satin stitch. They were done in a private school in Boston over one hundred and fifty years ago, by nieces of General David Cobb.

This, which we call a wing chair, is of the Queen Anne pattern. It is a fine piece. That sort of thing gets this name because it dates back to about 1702 when Queen Anne came to the throne.

Over in the corner at this end is a Hepplewhite wall cabinet in which we keep china and ornaments, its date —1780. The Newhall china in it is worthy of admiration and dates back to about 1740. The cabinet contains three different kinds of china:—Newhall, Staffordshire, and Leeds; and in addition to that a set of lovely silver luster. In it also see this red scarf. Mr. George Nixon Black told me that General Cobb wore that scarf around his neck.
when he was fighting in the War of American Revolution.

On top of the cabinet you will see two lovely Waterford glass candelabras.

Against the inside wall, between the two doors of this room to the hall or corridor, is this old English piano to which I ask your particular attention. The label on it says that it was made by "pianomakers to the Prince Regent." Now the wicked Fourth of the Georges who were kings of England was made Prince Regent in 1811 when his father was insane. He became King George the Fourth in 1820. So we know almost exactly the date of the making. The last piano which was used when the family lived in the house was an upright. There was a piano player which went with it and they stood here. We still have them somewhere in the house to remind us.

Over this Regency piano the picture is "The Garden of Eden—Sunset" by G. L. Brown, an American painter, painted in 1847.

This lampstand and candlestand, which I show you here, is a great-grandfather of the modern bridge lamps. As in the case of the piano, we have the later models also, and the last Mr. Black used to read by a kerosene lamp on a wrought-iron standard as tall as this, which we still have somewhere in the house. But we show you the one used by the first Colonel Black, before 1854 when the word "kerosene" was first invented. It was probably made about 1690, a blacksmith job. Notice that it is a smokers' stand as well as a candle lightstand. Here are the tongs with which you take coals from the open fire to light a pipe or cigar, and here you have the little tool with which to tamp down the tobacco in a pipe. See the sliding arrangement by which the candles can be adjusted to any level.

This highboy is what they call of the William and Mary period. William and Mary came jointly to the throne in 1688, and Mary died of smallpox in 1695 so the phrase means that it dates back as a pattern to about 1690. It is made of burl walnut.

Over here you will see a chair almost unique of which we are especially proud. Mr. Wallace Nutting has made drawings of it for his book and we have a lantern slide made from those drawings to use when people lecture on the house. In a book about furniture, called "The Hudson Moore Book," you can read that there is one of these Dutch bedchairs at the Cooper Institute in New York. I used to say that no one knew any third example, but
very recently Mr. Nutting’s attention has been called to a third, which is for sale at a very large price.

Sometimes I put this chair through its motions and show how, by altering and stretching it, you can make a comfortable bed. I suppose that in the days when inns and taverns were not so good or plenty, Colonel Black and General Cobb wanted to be able to make a guest comfortable even if all the bedrooms were otherwise engaged.

Crossing the room to the opposite side near the windows I show you a lovely Hepplewhite desk. See how it is ready with all the appliances. It is just as it was when the family last used it.

On this table here you will see an especially interesting candlestand. I ask you again to think of the days when there were almost no lamps because there was only whale oil and lard oil and lanterns were often candle lanterns. See how convenient this is to carry the candle. See how you can put it through its motions as you can put the chair through its motions. It can be altered to stand on a table, or be lifted by this handle, or hang on the wall.

This tripod table is of the Chippendale pattern. See how these two sofas shut in the space before the fireplace for winter comfort. One is of the Sheraton model and the other is Hepplewhite. And the last things before we go into the other room are these two chairs of what is called the Martha Washington model, lovely old things.

Now we pass through these double doors, which are never shut. This further half of the long space is called the dining-room, Colonel Black, the first of the Blacks, and his wife, Mary Cobb, had their meals in what I shall call the wing kitchen, which I shall show you presently. But the last Mr. Black preferred this as a dining-room, and it was always so in my time with him.

See the fireplace and marble mantel which faces and corresponds to the one at the other end which I described to you.

Often in the summer season we set the dining-room table every day exactly as I used to have it set for dinner. When the last Mr. Black sat down to dinner he used the candlesticks of his great-grandfather, General David Cobb, and we put them on the table to make the setting complete. See the rat-tail spoons, which are very early English silver, and see the goblets on the table, which are Sandwich glass, American. Notice the bonbon dishes. They are Waterford glass, Irish. The plates and other china on the table are Polychrome Spode, all dating back
before 1820. I am very proud for myself and those who came before me in the care of these lovely things. We still have four dozen plates. There were never any more. In more than one sense of the word we have an unbroken record on plates and china. Now, while in other famous and historic houses you are likely to see a sort of an exhibition of treasures in which the best is put forward, remember that that is not so here. This may be good enough to be best, but it is everyday. I have put nothing on the table which I did not regularly put there.

Off to one side I show you a little Duncan Phyfe tea table, and on it we keep the most valuable book in the house. It is in this glass case. It was printed in Cambridge at the Harvard College printing press in 1672.

The sideboard over here stands against the interior wall. The two strangely shaped boxes which you see standing up above it are the knife and fork boxes. Some of what they contain is coin or sterling silver. The rest is the specially fine kind of plate, rolled on copper before other methods were invented, called Sheffield plate from Sheffield, England. It ceased to be made a very long time ago.

On the sideboard, also, are the coolers in which to make wine or champagne cool. Then here is the device which General Cobb and Colonel Black used for heating water. It is called today by the Russian word “samovar,” but that name was not used for this sort of thing when this was made, for it was made in 1735 in Taunton, Massachusetts. That was General David Cobb’s old home town. He was born there and he is buried there.

Remember that the furnishings of this house are complete for immediate use and occupancy in all respects. It has always been bountifully supplied with linen; table linen, bed linen, towels, and all the other things like that which a great house could want. Here in this sideboard I show you a complete supply of dining-room linen.

Over here on the wall which separates the two parts of the big room you see this cabinet in which we keep lovely old china. Some is Spode and some is Staffordshire. Remember, also, that we are not showing you locked up treasures. These are here just as much for use as for ornament. When I brought in afternoon tea, as I very often did, we used the Spode dishes from this cabinet. In the same cabinet are the luster cups, and those General David Cobb used to drink his tea.

This being the dining-room you see we have twin dining-room tables. One is set up in the middle of the room
for ordinary use and the other is for enlargement. These are the Duncan Phyfe type of table. He made the first tables of that kind in New York City on Fulton Street beginning a century and a half ago.

This silver pitcher standing on this table here was given to Colonel John Black by Elijah Hamlin. From the inscription on it we see that it is over one hundred years old with the date 1835. It is pure coin silver made in Boston. The candelabra on the table are English Sheffield plate.

And here is a coffee urn, but the heater underneath it is of a later period.

In this room in what is sometimes called a ship carpenter's desk in the corner by the window we happen to keep the old receipts which show how Colonel John Black paid his postage. Postage stamps were not invented until long after Colonel Black had lived in the Black House many years. The idea was born in a speech by the real inventor Sir Rowland Hill in London on February 13, 1837 and postage stamps were not compulsory in the United States until July 1, 1856.

In early days John Black had credit at the post office. Every letter took a different rate of postage according to the distance it was going. The phrase was that the postmaster "taxed" each letter and determined the amount of the tax, which he charged to John Black's account. That was settled only four times a year.

This ship desk may also be called an early Empire desk. See how conveniently it folds up when not in use. The portraits which hang over this desk are of the elder George Nixon Black and his wife, Mary (Peters) Black.

And over here near the window next to the division wall between the two rooms I show you what the French call a long chair. Even in America we use the two French words for it,—"chaise longue," and this particular one was made in India, came to England, thence to Ellsworth, Maine.

We are standing only a few feet from the place where the bells ring. I show you how they work by pulling this beautiful bell-cord. Hear the ring! To a stranger, perhaps, the bells may sound all alike, but the six bells sound as different to me as the voices of six people. Nowadays people have a bulletin board in the kitchen and you read the name of the bell. But I doubt if the servants in the old days here could read. Anyhow these bells ring from six different rooms in the house. I know each one by sight as I look up and I know each one by sound. If the doorbell
had rung while I was anywhere within hearing of the bells I would have known the difference from the other bells and gone to the front door. Whoever is in the wing kitchen knows that I was ringing the dining-room bell and can guess that there is no occasion to go to the front door. The connection between the bellpull and the bell is, of course, mechanical, and so the craftsman who provides a house with bells is sometimes still called a bellhanger.

On this mantelshelf I show you another pair of old lamps. These also were possessions of General David Cobb. You will remember what I said about the hand firescreens at the other fireplace. Here you see a Chippendale standing firescreen.

Remember that the Black House is always open in winter by appointment. And we need those admission fees. You may find a little of the furniture covered up, but if you will give notice you will be welcome. You will find logs blazng in the fireplaces at the two ends of this room. If you are fortunate the sun will be reflected from the snow outside, and if it were possible to admire the house more than in summer, you will have a good opportunity.

Now come over to the other side of the room and see this lovely Queen Anne table. Look at the feet—each is like a horse’s hoof. That suggests to you at once that the legs also should be something resembling legs. The exact furniture word for that is cabriole. When I called them that, talking with Mr. Hale, he told me that the word meant goat, not horse, and that a cabriole leg is one that can be described in another word coming from the same root, as if the animal were capering. The idea and the derivation is the same as the cabriolé. Perhaps you think of that now as a kind of automobile, but the horse carriage was something that went lightly capering through streets of London or Paris.

On this table you will see a pair of what are called “coasters” to hold wine bottles. They coast or slide around the table with the bottles on them, always going to the left. In these the bottles are decanters of beautiful Waterford, Irish glass. Notice that they have no handles, which shows that the wine drunk out of them is not to be cold. If it were to be cold it would be served by a jug with a handle so as not to be warmed by the heat of the hand.

Over the first fireplace which I showed you at the other end, and now at this fireplace, the mirrors match. They are framed in gold leaf and they set the two ends of the room up facing each other with great beauty. See how the proportion of each of the rooms and the combination

Page Twelve
of the two are architecturally perfect, and look around at the fluted woodwork, and I don't think you can suggest anything better.

This pair of 1840 rocking chairs are called mid-Victorian. Perhaps they are a little early for that word for Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837. But this pattern stayed in fashion long enough to be mid-Victorian. They had ceased to be fashionable when I came to the house but Mr. Black thought them very comfortable and kept them here and used them constantly.

The clock on the mantelshelf is of the Queen Anne pattern. You can see that the maker had his shop in the Cornhill in London. Everywhere as you go through the house you will see that the Blacks had beautiful clocks of different sizes and kinds and dates. Whatever the Blacks bought or owned like that was always of the first quality, and now you and I reap the benefit of their care, for all the clocks still go and still strike and they give us very little trouble.

On the mantelshelf is a pair of old holders for stationery. Also a pair of soapstone lions, carved in Florence, Italy. And another pair of whale-oil lamps. Notice that these lamps have only one globe and flame while those at the other end had two globes and two flames. Notice that all these lamps that I am speaking of go back to whale-oil times. They were before lard-oil and kerosene lamps. Indeed, if you will look up the word "kerosene" in the dictionary you will see that the date given of its earliest use is about 1854.

Here are three big steel engravings on the walls of this room. Each of them is intended to be a representation of history and two of them have a special connection with the Black House.

Let us begin with this one which represents Washington's Farewell to his Generals. There is a key to it, but General David Cobb is not listed as one of the generals who is portrayed in the picture. He is probably one of those in the background.

But remember that when Washington did say good-by to his generals he held that Peale miniature in the other room when he said good-by to General Cobb and handed it to the general for his lady wife. It was a testimonial of Washington's gratitude for Cobb's assistance.

Now look at the next one, which is Martha Washington's first reception in New York City. Remember that that was the first capital of the United States of Ameri-
ca under the Constitution. General Washington and his wife, called Lady Washington, started out in real style to hold a sort of court, and this is her first reception.

Now when we look at the great lady in the foreground of this picture, ranking next after Lady Washington, think of the answer which connects her with the Black House. That is Mrs. William Bingham of Philadelphia. It is her husband who is to buy two counties of Maine and half of Mount Desert Island. It is he and his descendants who are to employ the Blacks as land agents.

The third of these steel engravings represents Benjamin Franklin being honoured at the Court of France. In the presence of Louis XVI, the Countess Diana de Polignac places a crown of laurel upon Franklin's head.

Underneath this last are two engravings by Samuel Morland.

Now come out through the door at the end of this room and turn to the right through this big door which separates the north wing and its kitchen from us. This door isn't wooden outside as you think it is. It is tin clad. It is almost the only change we have made in the whole building. But for modern fire protection it is a modern fire door. I doubt if you can tell that it is an imitation. The brick wall and the tin-clad door ought to stop a fire from the kitchen long enough for the Ellsworth Fire Department to get here and save the house.

This big north room, which we call the wing kitchen because it is in the north wing, was the original dining-room. Both this and the room beyond it, which we now use as a real kitchen and don't show to visitors, originally had these beautiful, big, old-fashioned, cook's fireplaces and this one still has all the machinery with which to cook upon the open fire.

Remember that the kitchen range and the enclosed fire for cooking were only invented about 1800 by a Woburn, Massachusetts Yankee, Benjamin Thompson. At the time that he invented them he was Count von Rumford of the Holy Roman Empire and Prime Minister of Bavaria. Just think what a queer story that is!

The first Colonel John Black had his dining-table and ate his meals always here most of his life. But when I came here I was told that about fifty years ago the room in the main house was taken for a dining room and this room was assigned to the servants. I was taught to call it the middle kitchen.

Here on this table each of these double-decked pewter plates holds more than a pint of boiling hot water.
They are called beefsteak plates. And here are pewter drinking mugs and a pewter tankard.

Over the door you see the bells. That means that when the bells were last hung by the bellhanger, this was the place from which the servants answered the bells. As I look up at them now, beginning at the left, I know each one by its location. The front door bell rings with a bang, No. 2 the drawing room, No. 3 the dining-room, No. 4 the master's best bedroom, No. 5 the bedroom always used by Mr. Pitman. I know that by its soft musical tone. No. 6 is the room upstairs which in my time was always the owner's room. It sounds like a sleigh bell.

Turning around see the mantelshelf at the other end of the room with all the candlesticks, and especially this pair of whale-oil lamps with bullseye lenses. These are most unusual. In the days before regular oil lamps you could put one of these on a table so that two people could read, one on each side. We buy sperm oil in New Bedford, Massachusetts, the great whaling city. Our visitors like to see these lamps burning real sperm oil. Sometimes at the end of the day or in bad weather we use this room for tea and all these old methods of lighting help to make it more attractive.

You will notice that this fireplace is so big that it takes a stick of wood four feet long, which is just the length that cord-wood is cut in the forest. The chairs here include some very fine curved-back Windsors. On either side of the fireplace are blanket chests, made of American pine wood, each with one drawer under the part which holds the blankets. This is an American antique which people do not know about or admire as much as they should. At the left you see a tavern table of curly maple. Notice how much it has been worn by actual use. This chair with the vast circular back is also a table, called a board chair table. I was told that the first, or Colonel, Black liked this very much and often sat in it. On the other hand the last Mr. Black remembered sitting in this little child's chair so much and so hard that he wore the paint off of it.

Near the fireplace you see the flax wheel and three swifts. These are not antiques to look at but the actual tools with which flax was woven into linen in this house. In the early days the bedroom linen was made at home.

In this candle mould the wax or tallow can be poured to make twelve candles at one time.

The plate warmer in front of the fireplace is a more modern device than some of the other fireplace things.
The tin kitchen, or Dutch baking oven, is older. This you put close to the open fire, facing the coals, and that makes it possible to cook the meat without having a fire underneath. I was told that at Thanksgiving time there was so much cooking to be done that they used both the big fireplace in the next room and this fireplace.

Now come back through the fire-door. Notice the weights and the fusible plug which make it shut automatically if things get fiery hot. After we go through it we turn to the right into the china closet or dish pantry. We are very proud of this. All our china and glass and dishes are here standing on the shelves; arranged just as it was when I came here to work.

These are Canton for breakfast.

On the second shelf is blue Staffordshire for luncheon.

On the third is the Polychrome Spode, a fine set, for party dinners. These were made in England. After 1820 all English china was compelled to be marked. You know, then, that English china not marked dates back before that.

These few pieces are Crown Derby. This was always marked with a cross and crown.

We have other Staffordshire besides the luncheon set; light blue, dark blue, and pink. Then we have these valuable specimens of Delft.

Turn around to the other side of the closet and you will see all the glass. We begin with the champagne glasses and the goblets and I make one of them ring for you with a lovely musical sound. Then there is Sandwich of different kinds and several sizes, including the blue finger bowls. We even have teaspoons of Dresden china, used not for tea but with a small cup of coffee. Much of the glass is Waterford from Ireland, valuable and beautiful. We used this next set of cups for soup cups. I suppose that in times gone by this dozen have been in the hands of many different servants but the last Mr. Black told me that when he came all twelve cups still had all their twelve handles, and I tell you that up to the present time I have had the same good fortune. Colonel John Black, the grandfather, had a fine white and gold dinner set, but that doesn’t seem to have had such good fortune.

Remember the glass and china which you saw in the dining-room, which is kept here when not set out. How could you have a better equipment for the house of a great gentleman?

We pass the back stairs and go on to the big staircase which only goes up to the living-rooms of the family in
this lovely spiral form. You see what a beautiful opportunity there is here to hang and show the pictures connected with the history of the house. These are not valuable original paintings. The first three, Washington, Knox, and our General Cobb are copies of Gilbert Stuart portraits. The Black family did own and very much prize an original Gilbert Stuart of George Washington, but that has gone to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. And General David Cobb was painted by Gilbert Stuart, but that original is in New York City. For another daughter of the General married Judge Wilde of Massachusetts, and from her it descended in the Wilde family. In the early days portraits which are now painted on canvas were often on wood. Our copy of the Cobb portrait is painted on mahogany. Next is Judge Wilde; then his daughter, Eleanor Wilde Mellen; then her little son, John; then her husband.

The upper tier of portraits contains, beginning directly over General Cobb, Mary Ann Black, who was the sister of the second and last Mr. George Nixon Black.

At the right of the staircase on the ground floor is a grandfather’s clock made by Aaron Willard (not Simon). This is the Revolutionary period and was given to Colonel John Black by General Henry Jackson. This old hand organ in the corridor hall belonged to Colonel Black. There are five rolls each with ten songs. Didn’t some of you think it was a radio? It was made in England, certainly before 1795.

Over against the wall, here, this tall imposing piece of furniture is a Dutch linen closet. After I had been here many years, I was showing it one day about five years ago when one of the visitors pulled out a knob and then we opened this drawer which goes all the way across. I did not know it was there and was much surprised.

Open up the chest and we find umbrellas and canes, as ready to use as they were when the family occupied the house.

Here is General David Cobb’s coat of arms, done in satin-stitch embroidery, framed, and hung above the chest. Under the staircase is a European piece of furniture of walnut.

Now stand here at the foot of the staircase and look at the dining-room wall. Hanging over the music box between the doors you will see this convex mirror with the peculiar name of girandole. It has a beautiful effect in giving a perspective view. One of our best postal cards is
a picture of this mirror which also serves to show the staircase reflected in it.

Up this curving principal staircase we go to the family rooms, of which there are five. When we get to the top look to the left, and you can pretend that you are any one of the three Mr. Blacks taking his guests upstairs to their several bedrooms. There are candlesticks for everybody, and these very candles are those which were part-burned when the last guests were here. Above the candlesticks on the table is a portrait of Mrs. Kerr of London, a sister of Colonel John Black who came out from England. On the opposite side of the landing is a Duncan Phyfe table. I remember the very first time I was shown through the house when I came here. Mr. Black then showed me these little playthings and told me they were his sister's, Mary Ann Black's, she whose portrait you have seen by the staircase. He then told me how she always loved these things, that she always kept them here and that he did the same and wanted it continued. The doll's pillowcase has her initials on it. See this little embroidered blanket. On the bed see this real ruffled spread. This is a Boston rocking chair. All these well-made things must have been carved out by hand to please the child.

We count that there are five master bedrooms. The four principal ones are the blue room, which I show first, then the one we call the master's room because it was Colonel John Black's. Then you come to two rooms which are connected. The first of those was often occupied by Mr. Pitman and I think of it by his name. The second is the one which was always preferred by Mr. George Nixon Black and was the owner's room in my time. In each of the five the arrangements for washing are the same. A fine china set of pitcher, bowl, and complete toilet arrangements. Each of these five sets is perfect today. So far as I know, not a piece has even been chipped or broken.

We now go into the blue room. The arrangement over the windows is called a lambrequin. The word originally meant the scarf or piece of stuff with which a knight in armor adorned his helmet, but now it means the things which you see above these windows. They, and the hangings over the bed, are over one hundred years old. This bed was fitted up before the days of bedsprings and has never had a spring upon it. Below is a rope and canvas arrangement, then a feather mattress, then a hair mattress, on top of which the bed is made up. Many is the
day that I have made up this bed for a guest or a member of the family.

This Queen Anne table with snake feet and the candlestick upon it have always belonged in this room. This candlestick was the property of General David Cobb.

Here is a little candleholder which has a transparent picture. A lighted candle behind it would enable you to see the picture well. Here, on either side of the fireplace, are little cupboards for keeping all sorts of things. Over this mantel, and also in some of the other bedrooms, are long mirrors of the kind called George Washington mirrors. I think that indicates the period in which they became fashionable.

You are going to see five bedrooms, and in them, eight bureaus. Of the latter, five are Empire and three of earlier dates. I shall tell you the differences about them as we go along. In the bedrooms you are allowed to walk on the carpets just as the family did when they went to bed. That is quite unlike the other famous houses you are shown. But we are proud that this house is different. We make you a member of the family for the moment.

The ornaments on this Queen Anne lowboy are as they always have been. What a lovely piece it is! Now count the Empire chairs. Four in this room, and eleven more will be seen before you have finished on this story. I mean eleven of one sort, not counting this small, cosy, comfortable, fireside chair which is a different pattern, but also Empire. I will now take you on to the corner room on the south which we call the Master’s room because Colonel John Black used it.

All of these beds are high. You must remember the canvas and rope which takes the place of a spring, the feather bed, and the mattress. Every room has a regular little flight of steps kept under the bed. I roll this one out and show you how easy it makes getting into bed.

On the other side of the room is this little dressing table, the feet of which are the pattern called deer-foot. It belonged to General Cobb. This piece has what are called turnip feet, and this Chippendale table, a large snake foot. Then here is a Sheraton dresser, and these are Hepplewhite tables. This high chest of drawers is full of blankets for all the beds and we call it a Philadelphia chest. The one on the landing at the head of the stairs contains linens in great variety,—all you could wish for.

In this room there are five mirrors, all in a row. And this Hepplewhite wing chair. And another of David Cobb’s candlesticks on the table at the head of the bed.
We will now go along the hall into the rooms which were used by the last Mr. Black and Mr. Pitman. Mr. George Nixon Black was born in a house down on Main Street, but when his grandfather died and they moved up here he brought this particular bed with him, and its old hangings. Let me explain the generations of the family. First there was General David Cobb, the first land agent. His associate, the young John Black, married Mary Cobb and became Colonel Black. He lived until 1856, and then the next Mr. Black inherited and moved up from Main Street, but the last Mr. Black was born before that.

The first half or the first of these two rooms was ordinarily used by Mr. Pitman. The bed in this room is a little Sheraton piece, sometimes called a tent or field bed. There are six fine Hitchcock chairs. That is a model that began to be made in Connecticut about 1820, and these are early pieces. When you admire this highboy of Queen Anne pattern and this chest of drawers, notice in the latter still another kind of foot, the bracket foot.

The second half or the second room is the one which the last Mr. Black always occupied and it was the owner’s room throughout my time. Also the table, the chair, and the Franklin stove are arranged in the same way and stand where they stood when his grandfather, Colonel John Black, was here.

This bedspread is handwoven; the pattern is the English rose, the shamrock, and the Scotch thistle. It is four yards or twelve feet wide. It must have been woven in the days of hand looms on a perfectly gigantic loom, for it is all one piece. It must be as old as the house today, but see how perfect the condition still is.

In the drawers of this dressing table I could show you the personal belongings of Mr. George Nixon Black just as he left them when he died in 1928.

On this lovely Hepplewhite bureau see the inlay of holly wood, and the bracket feet. This was General Cobb’s.

I open the second drawer and take out Colonel John Black’s dress shirt. See what a beautiful piece of clothing it is and how perfectly it has been preserved. See the slip of paper written by the last Mr. Black recording what it is. And see these nine gussets! The shaving mirror on this bureau was General Cobb’s.

Now I go to this other bureau and from one of its drawers I take out and show you the silk quilted petticoat which belonged to General Cobb’s wife. It came down by
inheritance to Agnes Black, of the last generation. See, here is the slip of paper. And observe that this was woven on a handloom.

And in the top drawer here we have the wedding stockings which were worn at her wedding by Mary Peters Black, the mother of the second Mr. George Nixon Black.

He used to tell me how he sat upon this little red chair, calling my attention to the rabbit ears on it. He could remember sitting on this chair when his nurse taught him to observe the weathervane, and those seemed to him to be the memories of only a short time ago.

Here are three little boxes in which to keep jewelry. And notice the toilet set of white spode. Then count six more Hitchcock chairs and three mirrors, two of which are Queen Anne, and one what they call a ball mirror, made before 1820.

Coming out of this room we stop at the bathroom door and I show you the german silver bathtub, cased in wood. Up to forty-five years ago there was no bathroom at all in this house. We like to keep on telling you that the house is a moving picture of the different lives lived in the nineteenth century by such a family, and as part of that picture you are going to see or hear of three bathtubs. The earliest in order of date is in the little bedroom on beyond here which was larger before we partitioned this bathroom off from it. Let us go along there and I will get it out from under the bed. The tin tub looks like a gigantic lady’s straw hat turned upside down. See the pedestal so you can sit down on the brim without tipping over, and the place for the soap. I was present when Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. were shown through this house ten years ago, when it was first opened to the public. Mrs. Rockefeller was born in a great Rhode Island family, the daughter of United States Senator Aldrich. When we showed her that tub, what do you think she said?

“I have been married to Mr. Rockefeller thirty years. Until the day of my marriage I had my bath every morning in the year in one of those tubs in my own bedroom.”

It was only forty-five years ago that running water came into the house and made the german silver bathtub possible. The metal of the tub is copper. This is not only the bathroom which was last used, but the very soap and shaving things, just as they were.
Downstairs we have the two latest bathrooms which were put in with white tubs.

Continuing to describe the little bedroom with the tin tub underneath the bed I show you a three-compartment bureau and call your attention to the bun foot. Think how many different kinds of feet! And see this little secret draw, the name for it is slipper drawer.

All the drawer handles and other handles in this house are the originals. There are no replacements and we are proud of that.

This table is called a pie-crust table on account of the shape of the edge of the top, which is a separate tray. It has snake feet.

Now that we have completed our journey through the upstairs part of the house, I tell you that we have twenty-two brass candlesticks in this house and keep them shining all the time. Mr. George Nixon Black used them at night and sent his guests to bed with them. I remember how a guest who did not want to read by one or two candles would come down into the kitchen so that I could quietly lend a little lamp.

On the way down stairs I want you to look through into the two big front rooms. It is another way of realizing how livable they are. And in the long hall see this Jacobean cabinet. Also this Jacobean chest, which we used for fireplace wood.

The tapestry hanging on the wall is French, and we think it was made about 1750. It is the scene of the Roman soldiers and the High Priest. You will see that each soldier has a distinct expression on his face. Mrs. Beatrix Farrand, the landscape architect, lives in Bar Harbor and helps us about the house and grounds, and her mother, Mrs. Cadwallader Jones, knew all about tapestries and told us about this one.

Here on the righthand side of the hall is the library, called sometimes the Cobb room. The English grandfather clock in it was made about 1760. Here we make an exception because the room is so small and ask you to look in only. It would be too crowded with all the furniture, and then people also.

The Cobb things in this room are many. They include the Chippendale chairs, the desk which is called after Louis the Sixteenth, the barrel chair, the drop-leaf table with four legs, the French clock, and the andirons which are made out of bell metal. Also the shovel and tongs and that clock and the books on each side of the fireplace. The sofa, the wing chair, and the Chinese Chippendale secre-
tary did not belong to the General. This secretary has what are called panel doors, and what are called bale handles. It contains a great many of grandfather Black’s papers and someday we hope to have them thoroughly examined and listed. Part of our hope is to find all the bills for building the house and buying the furniture.

The McIntyre basket mirror with ball trimming was made before 1820.

Behind this French clock on the mantelpiece is a picture of general David Cobb’s house in his old home town of Taunton, from which he came. On the other side of the clock is a picture of the first headquarters of the Bingham Estate on a Gouldsboro peninsula. Some of Colonel John Black’s children were born there before they moved up to the Ellsworth house.

Another reason for not letting people into the room is the English velvet carpet which we want to save for future visitors.

Look at the fireplace screen and remember that each of these screens has a pattern which is beautiful. See this one.

Now we have finished with the house itself. You can come into the glass porch as you go out and see all the postcards and photographs of which you may want some. There is a great deal to see here beyond the house, but we leave that to you.

To help you with your choice I tell you a little about the gardens, the out-buildings, the carriages and farm tools, the grounds, the tomb where many of the Blacks are buried, the forest woodland with its big trees through which you can drive safely in an automobile.

It would be natural and easy to go out from the front hall to the back into the garden. See the croquet ground and the white pine hedge around it. Then walk to the right in front of the farm buildings and cross the roadway to the carriage house.

You will find a wonderful collection of carriages. The best is the oldest one, and you can imagine Mrs. John Black going to church in it and riding out on state occasions when this part of the country scarcely had any roads.

Not far behind it is one of our youngest antiques in the way of carriages. It is one of the very first Model T Ford sedans. And in between there are a great many carriages, each one worth examination, and almost all bought from the finest carriage makers.
Sometimes people care enough about the way that white pine was used in the hedges here to go and see the hen-yard. Our hens have always had luxury. At least, ever since I have been here they have been sheltered from the sun by a thick, clipped roof of white pine.

Some of you will like to walk through the beautiful old barn and see the farm tools, farm wagons, and the less important carriages. Over beyond the farm buildings, to the west or southwest, you will find the Black tomb. Or you can go out the front door of the house and over the wall and walk direct to it through the remains of the horsechestnut avenue along which the Blacks were carried to their last rest. And the planting around the tomb was also, originally, a horsechestnut grove arranged in the pattern of five dots which you see when you throw dice.

Mr. George Nixon Black was very fond of good horses of the trotting-horse kind, and you can go out and drive around the half-mile trotting track in the pines. He was also such a great gentleman that he took his carriage exercise on his own land. His roads through the woods are passable for automobiles, if you go slow enough. They are perfectly safe, and we think people would go there more if they only realized that the woods contain some of the finest and best preserved big trees in Maine.

When you go away you will drive out through our exit drive. Look out for the thickets of rhododendron. Nobody has succeeded so well in growing a big lot of rhododendrons so far north.

I have one more thing to say. I have tried to make you enjoy your visit and to tell you about everything of interest in the house and grounds. But it is absolutely impossible to tell all these things at one visit. Come again, and yet again, and each time you are taken through the house you will hear something additional and interesting.

If you are especially interested in one line of things, like miniatures or engravings or chairs or the feet of chairs and bureaus, come again and go through the house with one of us and we will try to be especially interesting upon your own subject.