



## **The Dower House Celebrates a Milestone Birthday**

If you have attended our Landmark Lectures, enjoyed a cocktail at Tudor Nights, or sipped a cup of Earl Grey during one of our Tea & Tours, then you have spent time in the Dower House. This red-brick, gothic-revival house was originally known as the Beall House. Located on land that was part of the original Tudor Place lot from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century until 1866, when it was sold out of the Peter family, the property was repurchased by Armistead Peter 3<sup>rd</sup> in 1961, after nearly a century of ownership by the Beall family. The reunified Tudor Place real estate was bequeathed by Mr. Peter to the Tudor Place Foundation in 1983.

This year marks the sesquicentennial of the Dower House, as the house was completed in the fall of 1869. This article will provide a brief summary of the building's history and an introduction to the Beall family, who were friends and neighbors to the Peter family of Tudor Place during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

When Thomas and Martha Peter purchased the Tudor Place property from Francis Lowndes in 1805, the 8.5-acre property comprised an entire block bounded by Congress Street, Valley Street, Stoddert Street and Road Street. In 1895, the streets of Georgetown were re-named to conform with the plan in northwest D.C., and these street names were changed to their now familiar 31<sup>st</sup> Street, 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, Q Street and R Street.

The entrance to the property was originally on R Street, and a carriage drive provided visitors a sweeping vista of the William Thornton-designed neoclassical house, which was completed in 1816. On either side of the carriage drive, where the Dower House and the other houses along upper 31<sup>st</sup> Street are now located, planting beds like those in the North Garden today, provided the Peter family with ornamental plants and an orchard of fruit trees.

In her will, Martha Peter left instructions for the sale of the northernmost 1.75 acres of the Tudor Place property to provide dowries for her three, orphaned granddaughters—Markie, Columbia, and Kate Williams, children of America P. Peter

Williams and her husband William G. Williams. As executrix of her mother's estate, Britannia Kennon was responsible for this task. Following the sale of the land fronting R Street, the entrance to the Tudor Place property moved to its current location on 31<sup>st</sup> Street.

The next portion of the property sold was a 1.25-acre plot, divided into three lots, the year after the Civil War ended. Britannia Kennon, then owner of Tudor Place, had suffered a financial setback in the post-war collapse of the agrarian economy that was based on enslaved labor.

One of these lots, that now includes the Dower House, was purchased in 1866 by Elizabeth Dodge Beall (1838-1922) and her husband John J. Beall (1835-1898). Like the Peters, the Bealls were an old Georgetown family with an equally impressive lineage. John J. Beall was the great-great-grandson of Ninian Bell, the original grantor for a 795-acre tract of land he named the "Rock of Dumbarton" on which all of Georgetown now lies. John was also a grandson of William Marbury, the well-known Georgetown businessman who was the defendant in the landmark 1803 Supreme Court case, *Marbury v. Madison*. John's wife, Elizabeth Dodge Beall, was the daughter of Francis Dodge, Jr., a prosperous shipping merchant who was appointed the Collector of Customs for the port of Georgetown.

John J. Beall graduated from Georgetown College in 1854 and later went into business as a merchant miller and feed dealer, a lucrative business in the era of horse-drawn transportation.

Construction on the Beall house likely began in late 1868 or early 1869. It was nearing completion in October of 1869 as an article in the *National Intelligencer* newspaper noted that both Joseph Bradley and John J. Beall were "each erecting fine brick residences on Tudor Place, near the junction of Congress & Road Streets, which will be ready for occupancy in a month or six weeks." This clue, recently discovered by Tudor Place Archivist Wendy Kail, pinpoints more precisely the date of completion as late fall 1869.

We are also fortunate to have the architectural plans for the Dower House in the Tudor Place archives. The house is a fine example of Victorian architecture with pointed, gothic windows and ample, carved details. On the interior, the house features two connecting parlors, a library, and a substantial dining room in the rear. The interiors are finely appointed with carved marble mantels, pocket doors, indoor bathrooms, and separate spaces for family and servants.

John and Elizabeth Beall had four children: Jane E. H. Beall (1863-1929), Frank D. Beall (1871-1893), Bessie Beall (1874-1891), and William M. Beall (1876-1961).

Armistead Peter Jr. was likely the photographer for a ca. 1890 image, now in the Tudor Place collection, of the Beall siblings along with an unknown servant who is possibly the Beall family cook, Sallie Russ.

The Beall's eldest son, Frank, was Armistead Peter Jr.'s best friend, as suggested by a photograph of the boys together on a swing on the Beall family's front porch. Frank also appears with the Peter siblings in the ca. 1886 photograph of the Tudor Place Lawn Tennis Club now in the Tudor Place Archives. Tragically, Frank died at age 22 of an unknown and incurable illness, just two years after the sudden death of his younger sister, sixteen-year-old Bessie Beall, in March of 1891. Armistead Peter Jr. noted in his 1891 diary that he "sat up with the Bealls", meaning that he joined the family around Bessie's casket in the parlor on the evening prior to her funeral. He also served as a pallbearer during Bessie's funeral, and her subsequent burial a few blocks away in Oak Hill Cemetery.

John J. Beall died in 1898, and Elizabeth Beall remained in the house until her death in 1922. Until the early 20th century, the Beall property extended west to 32nd Street, spanning the entire block like the Tudor Place property. By 1909, the western third of the Beall property had been sold off. The 1913 District of Columbia Real Estate Plat also indicates that the present garage was constructed on the rear of the remaining lot between 1909 and 1913 .

With their mother's passing in 1922, siblings Jane E.H. Beall and William Marbury Beall (and his wife Caroline) inherited the house at 1670 31st Street. It was likely after William M. Beall assumed ownership that several improvements were made to the house, including a rear addition on the first floor with space for a butler's pantry, bathroom, and laundry room.

It was also at this time that narrow-width oak flooring was put down in the Dining Room, covering the original 1869 walnut floor. During the removal of the oak floor in the winter of 2017, a 1923 Bradley, Beall & Howard, Inc. insurance agency calendar was discovered. It had been folded and used as a shim beneath a portion of the oak floor. The calendar dates to the era when William. M. Beall was vice president of this company, the District of Columbia subsidiary of the Franklin Fire Insurance Co. of Philadelphia.

William M. Beall died in 1961. It was from his widow, Caroline C. Beall, that Armistead Peter 3rd arranged to purchase the 1670 31st Street property in October

1961, thereby returning to Tudor Place a portion of the land his great-grandmother Britannia had sold after the Civil War. Just as John J. Beall had repurchased the land formerly belonging to his great-great-grandfather Ninian Beall in 1866, Armistead Peter 3<sup>rd</sup> repurchased this same plot because it had previously been owned by his great-great-grandfather, Thomas Peter.

By the fall of 1961, Mrs. Beall was only living in the house for a few months of each year, spending much of her time at her New Hampshire property. As part of the purchase agreement, she received a life tenancy in the 1670 31<sup>st</sup> Street property. Mrs. Beall moved out of the house by 1966, however, even though she would live for another six years.

Armistead Peter 3<sup>rd</sup> took possession in 1966 and began making improvements. Widowed after the death of his wife, Caroline Peter, in 1965, he saw this house as a residence for his daughter, Anne, and her family, who resided in the house in the late 1960s.

In 1973, Armistead Peter 3<sup>rd</sup> married widow Helen Cowles Tucker Andrews Macondray (1900-1995). As he continued to plan for the eventual transfer of Tudor Place to the Foundation that he and his first wife, Caroline, had created, he began to envision the adjacent 1670 property as a residence for Helen if she survived him.

In 1978, Armistead Peter 3<sup>rd</sup> undertook a massive renovation of the house. As part of this project, many of the gothic windows were removed and bricked up, and several 19<sup>th</sup> century windows on the second floor were replaced with smaller, modern sash windows. Cast-iron window guards were added in 1979—though they have now been removed and are presently used as trellises in adjacent garden beds. On the interior, some of the room configurations were altered, and, most significantly, a small elevator installed to provide easier access to the second floor and basement.

The iron fence along the front of the house and the adjacent chain-link fence separating the front from side yards were also installed in the fall of 1979. When the porch of the Beall house was renovated, Armistead utilized the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, cast-iron balusters that were formerly on the roofs of the Tudor Place East and West hyphens. This Victorian ornamentation had been removed as part of the 1914 renovation of Tudor Place, stored in the basement, and replaced with a neoclassical balustrade designed by family architect Walter G. Peter, which was more in keeping with Thornton's original design for the house. This is just another example of Armistead Peter 3<sup>rd</sup> utilizing architectural salvage before it was a widespread practice in home renovations.

In 1980, Armistead Peter 3rd deeded the 1670 31st Street property to the Foundation, with the stipulation that life tenancy be given to his wife, Helen, if she survived him. At his death, Tudor Place would become the property of the Foundation, and 1670 could be used as her residence once Tudor Place opened to the public as a museum. Armistead Peter 3rd also had the foresight to recognize that the Foundation he created would eventually need an administrative building. Six months after the death of the surviving spouse, the house would become the property of the Foundation. Armistead Peter 3rd died on December 9, 1983, and Helen T. Peter moved into the 1670 property in early January of 1984. Mrs. Peter lived in the house, which began to be called the “Dower House,” for the next decade. In deteriorating health, Helen T. Peter moved to a convalescent home in Bethesda in 1994 and died the following year at age 95.

Today, the Dower House serves the role that Mr. Peter envisioned for it—as the administrative building for the Tudor Place Foundation. It provides staff offices, and a venue for events, lectures, meetings and rentals. As we look ahead to the future, one aspect of our Master Preservation Plan includes the addition of space to the rear of the Dower House that will provide a 75-seat lecture hall with the latest technology that we can use for seminars, lectures and workshops. This new space will help us further achieve Mr. Peter’s vision for a Foundation that is focused on “the preservation of the heritage of the United States of America” role his family and Tudor Place played in two centuries of American history.

-Grant Quertermous, Curator