Annual Report 2021

KING MANOR ASSOCIATION OF LONG ISLAND, INC.  DECEMBER, 2021
A note from our executive director

Dear King Manor Family,

I’m so delighted to end the year on such a positive note. What a joy it has been for us to review all the wonderful things we’ve accomplished in 2021 thanks to your support! I hope you enjoy looking through all the hard work and fun memories we’ve had at King Manor, despite the ongoing challenges. Some things I’m most proud of are:

- Presenting our upcoming environmental history themed VR tour at an international (online) conference in the Netherlands
- Deepening our relationships with our community and making amazing new partnerships through multiple pop-up fairs, essential supply giveaways
- Completely opening our second floor rooms to the public
  - and inaugurating this new gallery space with a community-curated art exhibit featuring local BIPOC artists!
- and just recently: receiving a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to expand our walking tour into a full-blown online exhibition about the free Black community in Jamaica c. 1800 and include their voices in the story we tell about antislavery activism.

While there’s still a lot of uncertainty going into the next year, I know that with your help we can continue to provide important cultural resources and experience to our community. New Year’s Eve is one of my very favorite holidays because I love taking the opportunity to reflect on the past (an historian’s natural habitat!) and make resolutions for the future. The new year always makes me feel so energized! And a big part of reaching one’s goals is setting them. Will you help us with the rest? We have big goals for 2022 at King Manor! Here are just a few that your donation will help us accomplish:

- Launch a VR tour: Climate Change at Home
- Make our museum more inclusive by hiring a Bengali-speaking educator
- Partner with local schools to engage children with our ethnobotanical community garden
- Brighten up our entrance hallway with a new and safer carpet on our main staircase
- Curate an exhibit showcasing art made by culture workers across the city
- Hang a chandelier in the historic dining room

If you would like to support our 2022 Resolutions, a tax deductible donation can be made at https://bit.ly/3EdxBxr

Thank you so much!

Kelsey Brow
Executive Director
Who we are...

King Manor interprets founding father Rufus King’s political legacy and antislavery history to teach critical thinking for a healthier democracy.

Rufus King (1755 - 1827) purchased King Manor in 1805, intending to retire from politics after a distinguished career: framer and signer of the U.S. Constitution, U.S. Senator, Ambassador to England, and vocal anti-slavery advocate who passionately supported the anti-slavery movement on the Senate floor until near the end of his life. Rufus led a conventional family life in Jamaica, Queens (then Long Island) with his wife Mary Alsop King, their five children, and hired help. A scholar of agricultural science, Rufus improved the land, turning it into a successful working farm. After his death in 1827, Rufus’ eldest son John Alsop King (1788 - 1867) bought the house and farm from the estate. Like his father, John made his career in politics, serving in the New York State Assembly and the U.S. Congress. As Governor of New York from 1857-58, John carried on his father’s legacy of anti-slavery advocacy and fought for the arrest of men who seized free black New Yorkers and sold them into slavery.

Opened to the public in 1900, King Manor Museum is one of the earliest historic house museums in the United States. King Manor is a New York City Landmark, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the centerpiece of King Park, the remaining 11 acres of the original farm and estate. The only green space in downtown Jamaica, King Park is a heavily-used public space and rich archaeological site. The only historic house museum in Southeast Queens, King Manor engages its audiences through historic site tours, school programming, interactive exhibits, workshops, the arts, and community events. We regularly collaborate with other local organizations and businesses and participates in initiatives that benefit the people in our neighborhood of Jamaica and our wider New York City community.
Community Partnerships

As a civically minded institution, King Manor is committed to being an active member of our community. The past few years have really emphasized the importance of coming together, and we are proud to be a part of the resilient, vibrant, and civically active community of Jamaica and broader Southeast Queens. This year we’ve continued to build partnerships with local businesses, provide physical space to community organizations, and participate in initiatives that benefit the people in our neighborhood.

In partnership with Queens Chronicle, we hosted monthly small business fairs where participants can learn about and support local businesses.

We periodically served as a Covid vaccination and testing site for the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Going Green at King Manor

This year saw the introduction of green environmental initiatives at King Manor, including a partnership with the NYC Compost Project to become a food scrap drop-off site. We also refreshed our ethnobotanical garden with the help of the Compost Project and Queens Botanical Garden, getting it ready to welcome students from a local charter school in Spring ’22 for an upcoming school-museum garden initiative!

Stay tuned for future green initiatives, including a special tour focused on climate change and 19th century living!
Welcoming new US citizens!

We were so excited to welcome the US Citizenship and Immigration Services back to King Manor to host our annual Naturalization Ceremony swearing in new American citizens. On September 17th, Constitution Day, we welcomed forty new citizens to the United States in King Manor’s backyard. As our caretaker Roy Fox always says -- not a dry eye in the joint! To see immigrants from across the globe become citizens at the home of one of our founding fathers is always moving, and we are so honored to be part of it.
Old Spaces, New Purpose

Over the past few years, the goal has been threefold: (1) to enhance period rooms and changing displays; (2) to improve collections storage and care; and (3) to open up more period rooms for interpretation, programming, and community activities. In January 2020, we opened a second-floor rotating exhibition space with plans for a 5-year exhibition schedule with historic themes, contemporary arts, and community conversations. Although this schedule was put on hold due to Covid-19, our inaugural exhibit The Queens of King Manor, celebrating the history of women in historic preservation in honor of the centennial of women’s suffrage opened September 2020 - May 2021. This special exhibition also includes a permanent online exhibition with interactive elements, a video tour, and object spotlights! Visit this exhibit and the rest of our online exhibitions at https://www.kingmanor.org/online-exhibitions.

More than just a space for historic exhibitions, these rooms have become a welcoming space for local artists to display their work and start important conversations. May-September 2021, the South Queens Women’s March curated a contemporary art exhibition MADE IN QUEENS featuring works by Queens-based BIPOC and majority women-identifying artists. The exhibition sought to decolonize art and start dialogues about representation and access, and included works by fifteen different artists.
In 2021 we hosted five different contemporary art exhibitions in our exhibit spaces and on King Manor’s grounds, with more exhibitions upcoming in 2022! All of these art exhibitions were collaborations with local artists and arts organizations such as Southeast Queens Artist Alliance (SEQAA) and Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning (JCAL). Often, artists intentionally displayed or created their art with King Manor’s architecture, design, and historical significance in mind, as with Tim Kelly’s paper mosaic installations (pictured right).

Others even included our collections, as with Hayoon Jay Lee’s ”Beyond Life and Death” (left) which explored human relationships with food during the pandemic. The installation included items from Eliza Gracie King’s tea set, and related poetry hung on the walls in historic frames. Hosting Lee and two other artists’ work was made possible through collaboration with JCAL’s Jamaica FLUX series this past summer.

These spaces, once Rufus and Mary King’s bedroom and salon, now meet a previously identified need among our arts community. In a 2017 study, ”Jamaica Is…”, artists noted that they had been forced to move their career outside of Queens despite a desire to stay closer to home, and cited lack of spaces as a primary reason. Others cited a community desire for more art in their neighborhoods, but had nowhere to put it. Since September 2021, we have received over 75 requests for art exhibition, driving home that these spaces are sorely needed. We are thrilled and proud to have been able to meet that need and look forward to continuing to make space for the incredible creative forces in Jamaica and beyond!

Join us through January 9th, 2022 to view works by Mahfuza Shammy Rahman in her series "Abstract Landscapes" made possible by City Artist Grants NYC.
Room Refresh

If you’ve visited the museum recently, you may have noticed a few changes around here! After opening a brand new interpreted historic guest bedroom in late 2020, we have continued our work in rethinking and reinterpreting our other period rooms based on new research and available collections. Concerted efforts have been made in the last few years to restore and preserve our collections, especially objects in the King Family collection such as Rufus King’s c.1800 Federal style desk (right) now permanently displayed in his library.

Rufus and Mary King’s formal parlor received special attention this year with the addition of several new pieces and the contributions of our wonderful supporters. Through a generous donation by Andrew and Dorothy Tananbaum, we were able to appropriately furnish the parlor with a c. 1810 mahogany couch. We also acquired two 19th-century paintings and a beautiful 54” mantle mirror, c. 1810. Finally, we want to thank the estate of Harvey Cohn for the beautiful (working!) case clock that truly finishes off the Federal aesthetic the King Family would have enjoyed.
Coming Home!

As part of our efforts to reinterpret our period rooms and tell a more robust narrative of King Manor’s history and context, we are pleased to announce the acquisition and/or restoration of several King Family objects and documents this year. Many of these pieces would have been used at King Manor during Rufus and Mary King’s time here (1805 - 1827) or John A. King’s tenure (1827 -1867) -- a true homecoming for these important objects!

Mary Alsop King’s Gown, c. 1810

Our closing exhibition this year, Design for Democracy / Diseño para la Democracia, shows how design touches everyday lives, from politics to dress. The highlight of this exhibition is Mary Alsop King’s beautiful gown evoking the fashions of ancient Rome, recently restored thanks to a grant from the Greater Hudson Heritage Society with funding from the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation. The gown is on display for the first time since Mary King would have worn the garment! One of the very few objects known that are tied directly to Mary King, it represents a truly priceless insight into her life and world.

Design for Democracy / Diseño para la Democracia is also King Manor’s first ever fully bilingual exhibit as part of our effort to improve access and better serve our diverse community.
Charles King Documents

We were able to acquire several documents and books relating to Rufus and Mary’s second son Charles King, including addresses from his inauguration as president of Columbia College (now University), a letter from Charles regarding his interest in a newly invented city water filter, and a first edition of ”Memoir of the Life of James Gore King by his brother Charles King.”

King Family Knife Set

Rufus King’s knives have returned to the Manor! Featuring the King Family crest on the handles, these knives are now on display in our historic dining room, and were unveiled in September at our annual fundraising event, Constitution & Cocktails!
Rufus King’s Document Box

Another personal object of Rufus King has also found its way home to King Manor. Rufus King’s document box, used for transporting and storing important letters and other work-related papers, would have been used early in King’s federal career during his first term as New York’s Senator, c. 1790.

Although the box is in fragile condition due to its age and composition, King Manor was able to send the object for restoration and preservation maintenance measures to hopefully halt further preservation concerns and extend its lifespan for future generations.

Our curatorial assistant Hannah Winiker hand-dyeing fabric for window dressings in the second floor family parlor, to be installed in 2022.
Community Programs

Every program at King Manor is designed to encourage critical thinking in learners of all skills and experiences, creating spaces for our visitors to mindfully engage with history in order to promote a healthier democracy as a whole. In collaboration with community organizations, city officials, and local artists and creatives, 2021 was a fantastic and successful year of free and accessible public programs!

Fall Festival
Our annual "Fall Fest" is designed to informally introduce visitors of all ages to the agricultural and social history interpreted at King Manor and connect families with environmental education, community initiatives, and local commerce. Held on the Museum’s grounds, the festival features hands-on activities like historic games, interactions with collections objects, and one-on-one interaction with King Manor educators, volunteers, and craftspeople. This year we welcomed the NYC Compost Project at Queens Botanical Garden to talk about composting at home and hand out compost material for home gardens. Participants made cyanotype crafts and read "zines" with Southeast Queens Artist Alliance (SEQAA), and folks from Hidden Figures of Madison came to lead art making activities connected to King Manor’s historical context and typically overlooked figures of our collective history. Fall Fest was an exciting return to a true festival format -- over 300 people enjoyed the event!
Traditions Festival

With support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, King Manor annually hosts Traditions Festival, a free weekend full of food, music, art, and crafts open to the public. The festival celebrates the historic traditions and cultural diversity of Queens. Traditions Festival 2021 became a month-long celebration with individual presenters each weekend of June in order to spread out visitation.

This year’s festival featured pan-Caribbean performing arts group Braata Productions, Filipino calligraphy with artist and activist Mark Libatique, Calpulli Mexican Dance Company, artist Juliet James, and Cheyney McKnight of Not Your Mama’s History with her ”Let’s Talk About Slavery” program. Festival guests have the opportunity to meet the presenters, ask questions and try their hands at crafts from a wide range of cultures. We look forward to returning to a weekend festival model in June 2022!
Annually, King Manor offers monthly free drop-in programs featuring history, art, music, and hands-on fun for families with children ages 3+. Each month, families can participate in a themed activity inspired by King Manor’s collections and 19th century topics such as weaving, agriculture, pottery, and miniature portraits. For many young people, King Manor is their first-ever museum experience. Hands on History workshops are designed to introduce historical concepts in an interactive setting and provide an entry point for children’s exploration of our historic site.

In the socially-distanced environment of 2020-2021, Hands on History program moved to online workshops and accessible crafts and activities were also made available on our website for families to engage with on their own time. These activities will remain available permanently online! As Covid restrictions eased up, we resumed Hands on History in an outdoor setting beginning May 2021. As we close out the year, our participation has remained largely consistent with pre-Covid numbers, and has been growing monthly.

King Manor also continued our partnership with the Queens Public Library’s Culture Pass Initiative to host online historic craft workshops, where participants use easily accessible supplies from their own homes (such as coffee filters, sticks, and washable markers) to simulate historic processes. These programs reached about 300 individuals live, and the recordings were made public for future audiences through the Culture Pass website.
King Manor @Home
Online Initiative

Launched in 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, King Manor @Home is a collection of online resources to help families, educators, and students connect with history and community. These resources are free and will be available permanently. They can be used as lessons unto themselves, further reading for students, and pre- or post-visit materials for future trips to King Manor. As we look toward the future of historic houses and sites, we hope to expand the King Manor @Home initiative well past our pandemic response in order to reach a wider, national audience.

New this year we introduced online games for children based on our school programs, helping teachers and students unable to visit to enjoy online alternatives that still challenge children to think critically in a fun and interactive way!

Life After Emancipation: Wilson Rantous & Douglaston

In 1827, Wilson Rantous purchased about $250 worth of land in the Village of Jamaica, Long Island to develop a space for the Black community to come together and prosper through fellowship, education, and civic engagement. With the support of the Museum Association of NY (MANY) and new research conducted by King Manor’s site manager Michael Colon, our education staff has collaborated to develop a walking tour in Jamaica to guide participants in discovering a grassroots movement toward one of the first Black voting rights conventions in New York State.

Take the walking tour or enjoy it online by scanning the QR code above!

The walking tour takes participants to eight stops in Jamaica and emphasizes not only the historic accomplishments of Black voting activists, business-owners, and educators, but celebrates a vibrant and civically-active community where the echoes of Douglaston’s residents are still felt today.
A special thank you to our 2021 sponsors & supporters

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