



Glen Foerd's formal rose garden contains many varieties of fragrant plants and provides a scenic backdrop for a small brick garden house that a former owner converted into a playhouse.

Soak in the Splendor

Spend a day marveling at the houses or touring their grounds, and you'll understand the attraction these Victorian-era majestic estates held for their Philadelphian owners and guests.



The Margaret R. Grundy Memorial Museum sits on a quiet thoroughfare of downtown Bristol Borough in Bucks County. Joseph R. Grundy, who purchased the structure when he was 21, was active in the Bristol community throughout his lifetime. As a result of his endowments to the museum and library, named in honor of his sister, and a local theater, he continues to have a positive impact on the borough.

Text and photographs by Greta Latzel and Celia Holmes

The late 1800s in America ushered in the Industrial Revolution and an accompanying prosperity for the industrial leaders of that time. The opulent lifestyles these entrepreneurs led are captured in the lavish homes and lush gardens they built in the Victorian style of a century ago.

Three of these homes stand today as testaments to the wealth and prosperity enjoyed by several Philadelphia-area families. Visitors are welcome to come inside: the Grundy family estate in Bristol, Bucks County, the Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion in Germantown, Philadelphia, and the Glen Foerd mansion on the Delaware River in northeast Philadelphia and see for themselves how the wealthy lived 100 years ago.

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The Margaret R. Grundy Museum

Entering the Margaret R. Grundy Memorial Museum in Bristol, Bucks County, is like stepping back in time. The rooms in this brick-faced, three-storied mansion are furnished in authentic, late Victorian-era trappings, and they appear much as they did when then 21-year-old Joseph Grundy's father (William Hulme Grundy) purchased the structure in 1884 for \$10,000.

Joseph was born into money as the son of William Grundy, who ran a successful wool processing plant out of the Bristol Worsted Mills. In the early part of the 20th century, the mill was Bucks County's largest employer with nearly 1,000 workers. The family sold the mill in 1946.

Joseph, who believed in public service, worked as a lobbyist and on a presidential campaign, served as a councilman for Bristol Borough for 30 years, and was a U.S. senator from 1929 to 1930. He also made generous philanthropic donations to such organizations as the Bristol Free Library, the local chapter of the Red Cross and the Bristol public schools.

A visit to the museum, which is named in memory of Grundy's sister Margaret, begins in a foyer paneled in European carved oak. Margaret and her mother, Mary, traveled extensively, and many of the furnishings in the house were acquired during their trips abroad.

Next, you move into the sunny, maple-walled front parlor, where less-important visitors of the day would have been received. Esteemed guests would have been ushered into the more formal cherry-paneled back parlor. Here, the sun shines through a colorful stained glass window above the fireplace and highlights the portraits of Joseph's parents hanging in this room.

In the oak-paneled dining room beyond, the table is set for a formal dinner for eight. Because the museum owns several sets of fine china, staff will vary the display depending on the time of year.

Grundy's office on the first floor looks as if he has

stepped out for a moment to deal with business at the mill or to attend a council meeting. A silver blotter, paperweight, inkwell, twine and paper clip holder sit upon his desk, and a nearby bookcase houses a collection of his favorite tomes. A portrait of Grundy's uncle, who was killed during the Civil War at the Battle of Fredericksburg and for whom Joseph was named, hangs in the room.

The office opens onto the foyer and a large, carved wood staircase that leads to the second floor. Upstairs, a bathroom complete with a large tin tub in a wood surround, a marble-topped sink and a pull-chain toilet serves as a reminder that many amenities that we consider modern-day conveniences—indoor plumbing and electricity—were in fact available to wealthy Victorians. Take a peek inside the well-stocked medicine cabinet; its contents remain unchanged since Grundy last occupied the house.

The southern-facing master bedroom, which was used by Grundy's parents, is the only room in the house without a fireplace. Hidden in the closet is a Victorian-era alarm clock with a big bell attached to it. Other unique furnishings include a large music box and Joseph's walking stick, which contained a battery-powered light within its staff that proved useful during evening strolls.

Beyond the master bedroom, Margaret's bedchamber is a soft-hued, feminine retreat from the predominantly masculine furnishings throughout the house. An ivory brocade chaise invites lounging, and a well-placed tea set suggests that Margaret may arrive at any moment. Joseph's rooms, which were on the third floor of the structure, are not open to the public.

Before he died in the Bahamas in 1961, Grundy established a foundation to maintain the home as a museum and to create a library in memory of Margaret. Today, a landscaped brick patio links the Margaret R. Grundy Memorial Library with the adjoining Grundy mansion. In a small park next to the library, a bust of Joseph Grundy commemorates his years of public service and philanthropy.



The gardens surrounding the Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion offer a peaceful retreat on a summer's day. The front gardens are designed in the style of the early Victorian era, and the gardens on the side and in the back are created in the style of the later Victorian period.

The Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion

The Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion, which sits on a tree-lined, shaded street in historic Germantown, almost didn't survive to become Philadelphia's only authentically restored Victorian house museum and garden.

Built in 1859 by Ebenezer Maxwell, a textile merchant and entrepreneur who made his fortunes in the dry goods business in the rapidly expanding suburbs north of the city, the home exemplifies the comforts and tastes of an upper middle class Victorian family.

Gazing at the structure's stone façade and distinctive tower, a visitor will scarcely believe that the home, which was abandoned when the last owner died in 1956, sat uninhabited for nearly 10 years. In fact, the mansion was almost razed to the ground to make way for a gas station before a group of preservationists recognized the historical importance of the building

and saved it from destruction.

Now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the house showcases both the early and later Victorian periods. The front garden and the interior's first floor depict life during Maxwell's time in the house in the 1860s, and the upper floor and side garden recreate the period of the late 1870s.

Vibrant colors invigorate the house, and the faux finishes that are so popular today were also obviously in vogue in the mid-19th century. The wallpaper in the foyer imitates blocks of marble, the doors are painted to look like expensive wood, and the fireplace surrounds in all the rooms mimic fine slate. Indeed, even the red floral wall-to-wall floor covering in the parlor is actually several strips of rug painstakingly sewn together before the carpet was laid.

The house contains the latest Victorian-era amenities, including indoor plumbing with hot and cold running water, a gravity hot air system and gas lighting.

The downstairs consists of a formal parlor where

guests were entertained; a dining room that also served as a family gathering place, sewing area and school-room; and a somewhat rustic-looking kitchen. The open divider in the kitchen outlines the original dimensions of this room before subsequent owners expanded it. In a nook tucked beyond the divider, photographs show the near destruction of the house, and an article explains the efforts behind its restoration.

The Eastern influence, which was all the rage after Philadelphia celebrated the nation's centennial in 1876, can be seen in the upstairs hallway where vivid decorations evoke the Egyptian Nile Delta, not a suburban Philadelphia home. An adjoining nursery contains a three-story dollhouse, built in 1859, some children's toys and a metal contraption used by Victorian youngsters to house captured squirrel "pets."

Across the hall, pocket doors separate the ladies' parlor from the bedroom area. Paint covers every conceivable surface in the parlor, from the rose-colored ceiling and the aqua-bordered walls to the purple-backed design on the wainscoting and the green vines painted on the shutter panels.

The master bedroom, which has not yet been restored, shows visitors the effort involved in returning the Maxwell Mansion to its former glory. In this room, the painted patterns on the ceiling and shutter panels are faintly visible, the plaster is bare of decoration, and the furnishings are sparse.

Once you have explored the interior, take some time to wander through the small, immaculately tended gardens that surround the mansion. The front garden reflects the landscaping ideas of Andrew Jackson Downing, a respected early Victorian garden theorist, and the ribbon side garden is a recreation of suburban landscape plans by Frank J. Scott that were popular in the 1870s.

Glen Foerd

One Sunday afternoon in the late 1870s, a young couple on a rowing outing on the Delaware River spied a statue of a black dog up on a bluff and, curious, climbed up the steep steps to investigate. Near the statue, they discovered a three-story house nestled among the trees and admired the breathtaking view of the river from the spot. They vowed one day to own the

house, and in time, not only did they succeed, but they transformed the property into the majestic estate of Glen Foerd.

Located at the confluence of the Delaware River and the Poquessing Creek, which divides Philadelphia from Bucks County, the tree-lined property was purchased in 1850 by financier Charles Macalester, who founded the village of Torrissdale (now Torresdale). An important man in his day, Macalester directed the Second Bank of the United States in Philadelphia and advised presidents from Andrew Jackson to Ulysses S. Grant.

Intent on retirement, Macalester built an Italianate country estate that he named Glengarry on the parcel of land along the Delaware River. After his death in 1873, Macalester's daughter lived in the house another 18 years, which gave Robert Foerderer, who had vowed to own Glengarry, time to make his millions. His perfection of a process for making soft kid-skin leather broke a French monopoly, and his exclamation of "Vici!" ("I have conquered!") gave his company its name. Eventually Foerderer went on to direct the Keystone Telephone Company and represent the Fourth Congressional District of Pennsylvania.

In 1893, Robert and Caroline Foerderer, the young rowing couple of 20 years ago, purchased the estate and began an ambitious plan to expand the house in the Edwardian and Classical Revival styles. They built a porte cochere over the front steps, covered the porch and added a wing containing a formal dining room, art gallery and grand staircase. On their daughter's suggestion, they combined Glengarry with their own name and christened the altered estate Glen Foerd.

Unfortunately, Robert died in 1903, just months before the renovations were completed. Caroline lived at Glen Foerd until her death in 1934, and then the Foerderers' daughter, Florence Tonner, and her family took up residence in the main house. A musician and poet, Tonner devoted much of her time and energy to collecting paintings, prints and books and supporting young artists. After Glen Foerd was passed to the Lutheran Church in 1972 and then to the local community in 1988, a group of neighbors banded together to ensure that the mansion survived for future generations.

The sprawling three-story ivory-colored home is

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Tour guide Vickie Niblick explains the restoration of a painting on display in the art gallery at Glen Foerd. Generous supporters of the arts, the Foerders and Tonners were also avid collectors, and their extensive collections on display throughout the mansion include objects ranging from glass bottles to oil paintings to antique furniture.

listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the décor of the house today represents both the Macalester and Foerderer families. Ornate plaster ceilings and wood floors with parquet edging can be seen throughout the mansion. Rather than front and back doors, the house has garden and river entrances into the main hall. A grand parlor runs the width of the house and contains dual fireplaces, elaborate chandeliers, 18th-century Venetian cabinets and lamps with

rare mica shades.

Nowhere in the house are the Foerders' style and opulence more evident than the grand staircase and art gallery. Beneath an elaborate skylight, the stairs rise to an intermediate landing with a built-in Haskell pipe organ, its towering pipes guiding the way into a second-floor gallery. The Foerders designed the gallery with its glass ceiling (now ultraviolet-coated Mylar) and U-shaped accent light fixtures to display their

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art collection.

Gold-colored silk covers the walls and showcases the oil paintings, which include portraits of British nobles, landscapes and a biblical encampment scene in an ornate golden frame. Other exhibits reveal functional pieces used by the family, such as the mid-1900 entertainment center with round television and record turntable and an enormous silver lazy Susan with a hot-water reservoir underneath to keep food warm during buffets.

Surrounding the mansion are 18 acres of grounds. In the rose garden across the drive from the house, visitors can see a garden house dating to Macalester's time that was converted by Tonner into a playhouse. Ginkgo bilboa branches frame a path to the old lily pond, and a trail along the riverbank leads to the recently renovated boathouse.

The property to the rear of the house contains tall colonnades, large potted plants and a two-level garden of pink lilies, red begonias and blue hydrangeas. A path lined with hostas meanders past the grave marker of Macalester's dog, named Little Ugly, and down to that statue of a black Newfoundland named in Little Ugly's honor, which had caught the eye of Robert Foerderer so many years ago.

From the mansion, a footpath leads past the vineyards and toward a gothic water tower, where Macalester stored water not only for his own use, but to sell to the neighbors.

The carriage house on the grounds was first used as stables for the families' horses and then as a garage after Caroline Foerderer bought her first car in 1907. The stone portion of the gatehouse, now in private hands, dates back to the 1820s, thus predating Macalester's ownership and serving as further proof that Robert Foerderer merely perpetuated a fascination with Glen Foerd that continues to this day.

THREE OF PHILADELPHIA'S HOUSES from the Victorian era survive today as landmarks of luxury, grandeur and the conspicuous consumption of early 20th century industrial wealth. Thanks to restoration efforts that allow the mansions to be opened to the public, the Margaret R. Grundy Memorial Museum, the Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion, and the Glen Foerd on the Delaware provide visitors with a glimpse of the past while being sure these historic treasures are preserved for generations to come. ▼

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Visitors Information

The **Margaret R. Grundy Memorial Museum**, located at 610 Radcliffe St., Bristol, is open 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday. The house is closed on major holidays. Admission is free, but groups should make appointments to tour the museum. 215-788-9432.



The **Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion**, located at 200 W. Tulpehocken St., Philadelphia, is open to the public from April through December from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Admission is adults, \$5; seniors, \$3; and children, \$4. Special events at the mansion include Victorian ghost tours in October and a holiday open house in December. 215-438-1861; www.maxwellmansion.org.

The mansion at **Glen Foerd**, located at 5001 Grant Ave., Philadelphia, is open for guided tours between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and closed on holidays. Please call two days in advance to make tour reservations; group tours are also available. Admission is charged. The grounds are open dawn to dusk, except when restricted due to private affairs. Special events at the property, which is operated by the Glen Foerd Conservation Corporation, include riverside concerts, lectures, a sailing regatta and a fall festival. 215-632-5330; www.glenfoerd.org. ■