



HISTORY

Built by the Beebe family of Boston in 1878, Highfield Hall was one of the early summer mansions to grace Cape Cod and is one of the few remaining examples of Stick-style Queen Anne architecture in the Northeast. Along with its adjoining mansion, Tanglewood, Highfield Hall was originally surrounded by park-like gardens, carriage trails, and almost 700 acres of woodlands. Heirs to a fortune created by one of Boston's merchant princes, the Beebe family entertained in grand fashion and embraced a genteel and formal lifestyle with a large cadre of servants. When the last Beebe family member died in 1932, leaving no heirs, the estate began a rapid decline into decay and obscurity. Despite numerous attempts to utilize the cavernous mansions for a variety of cultural and institutional purposes, the fate of Highfield Hall and Tanglewood remained in question for decades and the estate seemed destined to be carved up into a major highway and 500 residential building lots.

In 1972 what remained of the Beebe's land was purchased by philanthropist Josiah K. Lilly and much of the Beebe Woods was donated to the town of Falmouth as a recreation area. The Beebe buildings were given to a local nonprofit, which decided that they were too enormous, and too badly deteriorated, to save. In 1977 Tanglewood was demolished. This led to an effort by local citizens to rescue Highfield Hall from the same fate. For nearly 20 years the volunteer group toiled to save the building until, in 1994, the nonprofit owner applied for a demolition permit. Because Falmouth's demolition delay by-law had just gone into effect two days before, a waiting period was required. Meanwhile, the volunteers galvanized into action by forming a nonprofit organization, Historic Highfield, and petitioning the town to intervene. The Falmouth Board of Selectmen referred the project to the Cape Cod Commission and the Commission requested mediation. Six years of legal battles ensued until, in the fall of 2000, Falmouth Town Meeting voted to seize the property by eminent domain. In 2001, the town turned Highfield Hall over to Historic Highfield and restoration began.

For the first decade of the organization, the restoration effort was led by volunteers who were largely carried by their passion for preserving a unique community resource. In 1997, Historic Highfield funded a feasibility study that was completed by Technical Development Corporation. The study included an architectural and condition survey, as well as a proposed plan for use of the building, restoration estimates and pro forma operating budgets. Restoration began in 2001, using the information from the feasibility as a case for support. By 2005, the restoration had stalled, the cost of the project had escalated rapidly, and new developments in town called into question some of the original assumptions of the study. A new executive director was hired, along with new

construction management, to complete the restoration phase of the project. A fundraising effort of \$5,000,000 was mounted and successfully completed in 18 months. The total fundraising campaign amounted to \$8,000,000 – funds raised almost entirely through private donations.

The Strategic Plan called for Highfield Hall to become an historic site and community cultural center. The idea was to create a new model for an historic house in that it wasn't a static display, but a house that was to be used and treasured by the entire community. As such, it was furnished with an eye toward creating a space that evoked the time period, but was welcoming, bright, and easy to maintain. Furnishings in the house were donated to be used, and were not accessioned as collection items.

Today, the mansion welcomes visitors, residents, businesses, and community organizations. A permanent IMLS-funded exhibition shares the history of the Beebe family and recounts the dramatic story of the building's decay, the threat of demolition, and the grassroots effort to save the building. More than a dozen changing art exhibitions annually grace the walls of the first floor rooms and the second floor gallery. Walking tours of the estate are offered on a regular basis while guided tours may be arranged in advance for groups. Nestled within a 400 acre nature preserve, the carriage paths and walking trails of Beebe Woods offer a serene setting for regular nature walks and nature programs. A dynamic music program, *Music at the Mansion*, offers chamber music programs, a lecture/recital series, and an Emerging Artist Program in conjunction with the New England Conservatory of Music. In partnership with a local bookstore, the Inkwell Literary Series brings in authors from throughout the country to talk about their works. The Kids Culinary Arts Academy features cooking classes for children ages 4 to 16, while adult culinary programs include classes, demonstrations, and a guest chef series. Lectures, talks and community programs, including story hours from the local library, round out the program offerings. Special events, like the Schubertiade and the Highfield Hall Holiday Ball, provide the opportunity to experience the Hall as the elegant venue it was intended to be.

Highfield Hall was the focal restoration project that made Falmouth eligible to be designated as a Preserve America community in 2009. The town is known for its efforts to preserve and maintain its historic character, as well as its open spaces. The Highfield story demonstrates what people, when determined, can accomplish and Highfield Hall today stands as a glorious testament to the power of community.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Barbara Milligan, Executive Director
Highfield Hall
P.O. Box 494
56 Highfield Drive
Falmouth, MA 02541
508-495-1878 x301
director@highfieldhall.org
www.highfieldhall.org

