

TOWER GROVE HOUSE

The Victorian Country House of Garden Founder Henry Shaw

The path through the Missouri Botanical Garden leads to a charming historic area and founder Henry Shaw's restored country residence, Tower Grove House. The Victorian area also includes Shaw's mausoleum, the Kresko Family Victorian Garden, Herb Garden, Kaeser Maze and Piper Observatory.

At age 39, Henry Shaw retired from his successful hardware business and spent time both at his city townhouse and at Tower Grove House, built in 1849. In retirement Shaw focused his attention, skills and resources on real estate, buying and renting many city and rural properties. He also traveled to Europe on three trips that totaled about a decade. Shortly after returning from his last trip in 1851, Shaw began to investigate gardening and spent his remaining years at Tower Grove House developing one of the world's top botanical gardens.

The name was inspired by the house's significant tower that overlooked a grove of hazel bushes, and later, oak and sassafras trees. The original house was designed by George I. Barnett, an English-born architect and friend of Shaw's. Together they planned many of the garden's structures built during Shaw's lifetime. Tower Grove House is Barnett's first design with an Italianate influence, a style popular among Americans who traveled to Europe in the Victorian era. Originally, the house was painted brick. In the 1890's the east side was completely rebuilt and running water and gas service were added. Electricity was added in 1912 and a stucco exterior was put on around 1919. The original east side was the servants' wing in Shaw's time.

The original west side of the house boasts ceilings over 12 feet high downstairs and over 15 feet high upstairs. Authentic deep moldings and ornate woodwork are also unique to the original structure. Meticulous renovation began in 1953, when furniture and materials once belonging to Shaw were located and returned. Tower Grove House was rededicated on October 29, 2005 after an extensive renovation. A new interpretive plan maintains Shaw's original country home as he lived in it.

Many of the 19th century furnishings belonged to Shaw; others are of the same era. During guided tours, photographs and other tools help docents tell the story of Henry Shaw and his home. Translucent archival photos in several windows allow visitors to compare the 19th century view to the present one. A new video recounts how Shaw developed his garden, from the first time he saw the site until he wrote a will that ensured its permanence. Visitors can "see and hear" several Shaw-era individuals; handle tools used by his workers; and leaf through a period photo album and map collection.

Reception Room:

Tours begin in the home's east addition, built in 1889 by Dr. William Trelease, who became the Garden's director after Shaw died. A five-minute video introduces visitors to Henry Shaw and Tower Grove House.

First Floor Hallway:

The home's original linoleum was uncovered during restoration. Its pattern is reproduced on linoleum that replaced the hallway carpeting in 2006.

Front Parlor:

Who was Henry Shaw? Why did he start a botanical garden? Did country houses really look like this?

In this room, visitors learn that about Shaw's life and personal history. They see photographs some of the European gardens that inspired him on his travels, such as Chatsworth in England and The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, near London. Shaw's first intention was to create a garden that served two purposes – display and education. He wanted to create a garden that was both a "pleasure garden" for the public and for himself; and a practical one that would help farmers and gardeners succeed. In 1856, he consulted Sir William Jackson Hooker, director of Kew, who linked him to leading botanical scientists Asa Gray of Harvard University and Dr. George Engelmann of St. Louis. They convinced him to create a *botanical* garden.

Rear Parlor:

Why did Shaw plant a botanical garden? How did he get everything done?

Maps, correspondence, a replica ledger, pens and inks are spread informally across the large table in this room where Shaw often worked.

Staircase Landing:

Shaw ran a farm here.

Visitors learn about the farm that Shaw ran on the property.

Second Floor Hall:

What can you see from the tower? What's in the rest of the house?

A panel explains how the house has changed physically, and what was and is in the east wing that visitors do not see. A trompe l'oeil mural from 1849 was revealed during restoration when a large mahogany and glass case was pulled from the wall. The mural will be cleaned and part of it kept for display. The old mural also contains patterns from the wallpaper that covered it. Inks will be analyzed and the pattern reproduced so the wallpaper can be copied.

In the future, interpretative signage will address various legends concerning the home's tower and how it might have been used in Shaw's lifetime, as well as views from the tower then and now.

Guest Bedroom:

Who slept here? How did Shaw learn botany on the frontier? Why did his garden interest botanists? Shaw's sister Caroline and botanical scientists such as Asa Gray and Sir William Hooker were among the guests who probably slept in this bedroom. The guest room is presented to appear as if a visiting botanist is doing research, with science books and pressed plant specimens on the desk.

Shaw's Bedroom:

What was Henry Shaw like? How did he die? Who inherited his money?

In the bedroom where Shaw passed away, visitors learn about his personal history and character traits, and how from the grave, he continues to influence and guide the Missouri Botanical Garden. Shaw endowed the Washington University School of Botany and continues to provide for many local charities through his will. A copy of the will, as well as English gardening books and periodicals he might have read, are on the desk.

Basement:

Who worked here? What kind of work did they do?

The southwest room addresses the contributions of others who maintained Shaw's house, garden and other properties. Visitors are invited to sit, read and listen as photographs, text and audible quotes tell the stories of Shaw's staff, some in their own words. Photographs of housekeeper Rebecca Edom; John Feugh, who became Shaw's personal assistant; and head gardener James Gurney are authentic. Other photographs are representative of the era. One panel discusses the enslaved people that Shaw owned.

The northwest room displays large photographic murals with tools and other implements used at the farm and garden - some actual, others replicas.

Where is the kitchen?

In Shaw's time, the kitchen was on the east side of the house, which was torn down after his death. A sign tells visitors about his love of wine and the wine cellar he kept in the basement.

Informal Dining Room:

Why was this room added?

A small room on the first floor of the west wing was added in the 1880's. Some meals were served here, likely to some of Shaw's workers, and perhaps to Shaw as well.

Gallery:

Before or after a tour, visitors may explore the exhibit gallery at their leisure. They can learn about the Garden since Shaw's time by following an historical timeline, exploring Trelease's contributions to the Garden and changes in Tower Grove House itself. They will also discover changes that are underway at "Shaw's Garden" today.

Hours and Admission:

Tower Grove House is open Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sunday 1 to 4 p.m. (The house is closed on Mondays, and in January and February.) Guided tours are available at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; Sunday at 1:30 p.m. Open house when tours are not in progress. Admission is free to all visitors in 2007.

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