

Press Release from Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn New York and the Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance, Dorchester County, MD

Historic Trippe House Interiors Return to Maryland After 107 Years

In an extraordinary moment for historic preservation, the interior woodwork of the 17th-century Trippe House has returned to Maryland's Eastern Shore after over a century at the Brooklyn Museum. Thanks to the efforts of the Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance (NHPA), the Trippe family descendants, and preservation advocates, these architectural treasures will soon be part of the Three Cultures Center at the Handsell Historic Site in Dorchester County.

The Trippe House, also known as "Carthegena" and "My Lady Sewall's Manor," is a circa 1690 brick home located in Secretary, Maryland. Around 1730, Henry Trippe III adorned the house with elaborate wood paneling and an ornate staircase to reflect his prominence in the county. By 1917, after decades serving as a permanent home and residence to many, its interiors were sold to the Brooklyn Museum. For 107 years, the woodwork was displayed in the museum's period rooms, showcasing historic architectural interiors from the 17th to 19th centuries. In the summer of 2024, as part of the Brooklyn Museum's strategic efforts to open more gallery spaces for its collections, the Museum decided to deaccession the Trippe House interior.

With just one week before the scheduled auction, Elizabeth Hughes, Maryland State Historic Preservation Officer and Director of the Maryland Historical Trust, contacted NHPA to raise awareness of the opportunity. This led to a swift collaboration between NHPA and descendants of the Trippe family, including Nanny Trippe of Easton, Tracy Leeser of Baltimore, and Ken Trippe, owner of the Whitehaven Hotel in Whitehaven, MD. Through a combination of an emergency grant from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority and donations from Trippe family members and NHPA supporters, the group raised enough to make a hopeful bid for the items. On the eve of the auction, the Brooklyn Museum offered the materials directly to NHPA, recognizing their intent to bring the woodwork back to its original county.

For over a century, the Museum has been a dedicated steward of its architectural interiors, preserving and interpreting these spaces while giving millions of visitors opportunities to learn about the history of their occupants and the objects they possessed. *"We are delighted that the Trippe House interiors are returning to Maryland, where their history and significance will resonate deeply with the local community,"* says Catherine Futter, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Senior Curator of Decorative Arts at the Brooklyn Museum. *"Their new home at the Three Cultures Center will ensure that future generations can continue to explore and celebrate the rich cultural and architectural heritage of Maryland's Eastern Shore."*

Rebecca Flora, Maryland Department of Planning Secretary and MHAA Chair, states that *“the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority was honored to play a part in returning the Trippe House period rooms to Dorchester, MD. This unique piece of our state's history amplifies the architectural history and stories of the Eastern Shore and shines a light on the valuable resources that can be found in the Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area. Maryland is grateful to the Brooklyn Museum for their care of these rooms over the past 100+ years and their commitment to returning them back to their home state”*.

The interiors will be installed in NHPA's forthcoming Three Cultures Center, a barn-inspired structure that will serve as an educational and cultural hub. Construction on the ADA-compliant center is slated to begin in 2025, coinciding with NHPA's 20th anniversary. The Trippe rooms will form a performance and meeting space as well as house NHPA's offices, allowing visitors and students to experience 18th-century craftsmanship firsthand. *“This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reconnect the Trippe House with its history and ensure that these artifacts remain accessible to the public,”* said Midge Ingersoll, Vice President of NHPA. *“The return of the Trippe House interiors is not only a victory for historic preservation but also a testament to the power of collaboration and community.”*

The original Trippe House, now used as a rectory and offices by Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, will not house the interiors. However, their return to Maryland brings them just 13 miles from their original site, where they will continue to inspire appreciation for the Eastern Shore's rich architectural heritage. Additional history of Handsell, the Trippe House and the Three Cultures Center can be found at <https://restorehandsell.org>