



## BOWNE HOUSE

Bowne House Historical Society, Inc. | 37-01 Bowne Street, Flushing, NY 11354

[www.bownehouse.org](http://www.bownehouse.org)

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### **300 Years of Queens Records Prepare to Go Public** *New Grant Will Facilitate Access Back to 1661*

FLUSHING, QUEENS – An early settler’s stand for religious freedom ... New York’s first living landmark, the Weeping Beech tree (*Fagus Sylvatica ‘Pendula’*) ... one of America’s earliest female preachers, and her missions abroad.... conductors and freedom-seekers on the Underground Railroad. What does the public know about these events in Queens history – and when will they have a chance to know more? Soon.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, Bowne House Historical Society ([www.bownehouse.org](http://www.bownehouse.org)) of Flushing, Queens is set to receive a substantial grant from the New York Preservation Archive Project (NYPAP) [www.nypap.org](http://www.nypap.org) in a ceremony on the Bowne House grounds. This major grant, part of NYPAP’s Shelby White & Leon Levy Archival Assistance Initiative, will allow Bowne House Historical Society to digitize and share its rich archival collections, which chronicle nine generations of one New York City family from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Letters, maps, deeds, books, photographs, ephemera, and other documents tell the story of the Bowne and Parsons families who occupied Bowne House from 1661 to 1945, as well as the story of Bowne House itself and its preservation over the centuries. Digitizing the large and important

collection over the course of the next year will, for the first time, make online access available to historians, scholars, students, family history enthusiasts and genealogists, and the general public.

The Bowne House Historical Society's archives are a rich source of information about a family that occupied the oldest extant house in Queens and one of the oldest in New York City. Built by family patriarch John Bowne c. 1661 ([www.bownehouse.org/the-bownes](http://www.bownehouse.org/the-bownes)) the house was home to generations that included well known philanthropists and entrepreneurs; the founders of the renowned Parsons Nursery (as evidenced in Samuel B. Parsons notes on its first 40 years); educators and civic leaders; Quaker ministers, missionaries and defenders of religious freedom; and abolitionists who aided freedom-seekers along the Underground Railroad in Queens and beyond.

Rosemary Vietor, Vice-President of the Bowne House Historical Society, spoke about the critical importance of the New York Preservation Archive Project award:

“Bowne House is grateful to be selected to receive this generous grant from the New York Preservation Archive Project, which will enable the museum to digitize and make available on demand its extraordinary archival holdings. For the first time the story of the Bowne/Parsons families (and the history of Queens and greater New York City over three centuries) will be available online to all who want to access that information.

“The contents of the Bowne House archives range from personal correspondence between John Bowne and his wife Hannah, written from prison after his arrest by Governor Stuyvesant in 1662, to letters between brothers lamenting their difficult position as pacifist Quakers in the American Revolution, to the family's activism in the abolition movement and participation in the Underground Railroad. For hundreds of years the women of the family were promoting literacy and education for all, especially underserved youth. The family's involvement in greater New York City civic issues from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries reveals a unique view of American history on a very personal level, and is an example of the American spirit at work, shaping history in a positive way.

“Reflecting on the stories of the Bowne and Parsons family members that will now be available to all who access our archives because of the generosity of the New York Preservation Archive Project, I am reminded of the quote from Margaret Meade: ‘Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.’”

The mission of the New York Preservation Archive Project, founded in 1998, assures that the important stories of New York City’s cultural and architectural history are not forgotten.

Archives, as repositories of knowledge and sites of power, play a critical role in that process. By focusing on preservation efforts throughout the city, the Archive Project inspires preservationists and others to explore local narratives that make up New York City’s history. What can be seen as piles of old papers by some is, in reality, a chronicle of powerful memories of places, neighborhoods, preservation battles, won and lost, and the heroic people who took a stand on the importance of places in our lives.

Brad Vogel, Executive Director of the New York Preservation Archive Project, commented on the organization’s award to Bowne House:

“NYPAP is pleased to be the recipient of a generous award from the Leon Levy Foundation which makes it possible to assist with the preservation of archival collections across New York City. For more than a decade, the Levy Foundation has made the digitization of significant archival collections a mainstay of its grantmaking to help tell a deeper, richer story about the City’s history.

“NYPAP will use significant funding from the Levy Foundation award for a grant to the Bowne House Historical Society, the stewards of one of the most important preserved historic properties in New York City. Located in Flushing, the Bowne House has long been celebrated as an important marker in the struggle for religious freedom and tolerance in the United States. Built in 1661 by John Bowne, the house was opened to the public in 1947 as a museum. Today, Bowne House is a tremendous symbol of the inspiring principles that led to the founding of the United States. What is less known, and what this grant addresses, is an incredible collection of papers, photographs, objects, and ephemera that, once digitized and made available publicly, will

enrich our knowledge of an important New York family, their unique “ark” of a house and its collections, and the Bowne family’s legacy.”

The Bowne House Historical Society was founded in 1945 by a group of local Flushing residents for the sole purpose of purchasing the c. 1661 house and opening it to the public as a museum. Today, Bowne House offers a full schedule of tours and special events throughout the year for the general public as well as customized tours for special interest groups and students of all ages. Most of the approximately 5,000 objects in the Museum’s collection are original to the House; a rarity found in few cultural institutions open to the public. The extensive collection includes fine examples of English and American furniture and decorative art; paintings, textiles and costume; household artifacts; rare books and manuscripts; and toys.

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