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A Tale of Love and Lottery

A Journey to the Hearthsde House Museum Lincoln, Rhode Island

In or around the turn of the 19th century, a Quaker by the name of Stephen Hopkins Smith lived along a dirt path known as Great Road.

His interests varied, but one curiosity he indulged was his fascination for a “young socialite” from Providence.

According to legend, Smith came into a vast amount of money—unexpectedly. The sum he allegedly won in a lottery was an unbelievable \$40,000—quite the mother-load in 1810.

With the cash infusion, he decided to win the heart of the young lady of Providence.

Considering she had once told him that she expected to live in one of the grandest homes in the state, he decided to build—directly across from his home—a giant palace, by the day’s standard.

Once the construction of the mansion was completed, he rushed off to take his lady friend for a buggy ride away from Providence and out to Great Road, expecting to impress her.



As the couple approached the large home, supposedly the young girl exclaimed, "What a beautiful house!" With this comment, Smith must have been excited by the prospect of making a proposal that would be accepted. But the newfound adulation would only last a moment because she then finished her sentiment with "but who would ever want to live way out here in the wilderness?"

Discouraged (more likely devastated), Smith quietly returned the outspoken but brutally honest lady to the city.

Her criticism must have scared his soul because the disheartened Quaker never married nor did he ever live in the home; rather, it was left for his sibling to enjoy.

However, this is only part of the story, of "The Heartbreak House."

The Hearthside mansion was built in 1810 and sat oddly among farms and forests along Great Road, which was then within the town limits of Smithfield.

According to the historical accounts, this area was originally part of the land included in Roger Williams's purchase of Providence in 1636, but it wasn't until 1871 that it became the town of Lincoln.

Cut through the thicket of the undisturbed forest in 1683, Great Road is one of the oldest thoroughfares in the country and is part of the Native American

trail; it extended from Providence to Mendon, Mass. The purpose of Great Road was to encourage settlements in the Blackstone and Moshassuck River valleys and to transport the region's products to the Providence marketplace.

The Hearthside House is two and a half stories and features a gable roof rising to impressive ogee curves, trimmed out with a beaded cornice above circular attic windows. The windows are topped by granite lintels and tall wooden pillars which support the full-height front portico, reminiscent of Mount Vernon.

The porch is topped by a dormer which repeats the curve of the roof and beaded cornice. When it was originally built, the dormer had a balustrade around it, but that balustrade was lost when a tree came down upon it in the 1938 hurricane. A smaller, similar porch is located at the side entrance.

The stone walls are constructed with an air chamber, filled with rubble, for making it warmer in winter and cooler in the summer; this technique would also eliminate the dampness of a solid stone wall.



The main entrance has a six-paneled door with double pilasters on each side, enclosed sidelights, and crowned by an elliptical fanlight. Upon entering the front door into the elegant foyer, visitors are greeted by a graceful "flying" staircase, with stairs set in a counterclockwise direction around a Tuscan column.

In total, there are 10 rooms with a fireplace in each, plus a third-floor attic, and another attic space above that.

Handsome blindfold shutters that fold into window reveals adorn each of the rooms.

Over the last 200 years, the home has comforted 11 families before becoming a museum. Its owners have included a candle and soap maker, a lawyer, a horse breeder, several farmers, a real estate developer, a merchant, coal and lumber dealers, a mill operator, a printer, and a publisher.

The property received its name from "The Hearthside Looms," which was a famous weaving business operated by the Talbot family in the early 1900s.

The last family to reside at Hearthside was the Mowbrays, who spent 40 years there. Then in 1996, they sold the property to the Town of Lincoln so that the historic mansion would be preserved and its legacy shared with the community.

In March, the Hearthside House Museum began to pay homage to its history and kick off a year of social events and exhibits, all surrounding the theme "A Year of Romance." The first event on April 4 will include chocolate, spirits and wine tasting, and is slated as a major fundraiser for the museum.

With house tours already started, the tourist season is in full swing, with an extensive and delightful menu of upcoming events posted on the museum's website.

The Hearthside House Museum is a must visit if you'll be in or near Rhode Island in 2018; be sure to include it as an essential event for the whole family. ★

For more details, visit hearthsidehouse.org.

