HISTORY BEGINS AT HOME.

The Historic House Trust of New York City (HHT) is a nonprofit organization that operates in tandem with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to aid in and insure the preservation of 23 city-owned historic houses located in parks in all five boroughs. We believe historic houses are not static antiquities – they are living institutions uniquely poised to address current issues while retaining their connections to the past. HHT is therefore dedicated to preserving our sites, protecting their collections, engaging diverse audiences, educating visitors and sustaining the nonprofit organizations that operate our houses.

PRINTING OF THIS JOURNAL IS GENEROUSLY UNDERWRITTEN BY FORBES.

PUBLISHED BY THE HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST OF NEW YORK CITY.

No part of this journal may be reprinted without the permission of The Historic House Trust of New York City, Inc.

ISSN 1083-379x.
WAT A HEARTY BUNCH, these lovers of historic house museums! We all have our reasons for loving these special places, and those reasons are as varied as the historical stories we highlight. Beyond the architecture, furniture, and the particular stories of the people who lived within our historic houses, there are larger, more abstract social and political legacies that resonate among us. Almost all of these legacies are framed by an element of cultural perception.

Whether it’s race, socioeconomic status, political persuasion, gender, or sexual orientation, these preconceptions are ingrained in the narratives of the historic houses, in subtle ways that may surprise you. From a lipstick to a damask drapery, such preconceptions are reflected in varying shades. This issue of the Historic House Trust Journal (sponsored by Benjamin Moore) presents varying ways that the concept of COLOR reveals different sides of human nature and habit throughout history.

We discuss traditional concepts of color through images and text regarding paints, dyes, make-up and textiles (I have included a photo of my apartment, adorned in the great Benjamin Moore color Peacock Blue), consider softer shades of light and dark in the camera of Alice Austen and the light bulb of Lewis Latimer, and pull in even more abstract concepts of color through a discussion of the concept of race as a color gradient and color words in the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

ON OUR COVER:
Superimposing a portrait of Madame Jumel and her children on the walls of her boudoir at the Morris-Jumel Mansion Museum, we suggest that our houses’ inhabitants continue to inform our perception of history. From the color of her painted lips to the rich aquamarine of her draperies, Madame Ju- mel’s color choices shed light on both the social and more intimate trends of her day.

You will see that the theme of this journal is “color,” and the Chair’s letter should properly emphasize that theme. This letter won’t however, unless the color is green, and I’m not talking about leaves. I’m talking instead about the large civic family informally known at Park Partners. These are the nonprofit organizations across the city, including HHT, that work in tandem with the Department of Parks & Recreation to bring essential support to many of New York’s beloved parks. They include the Bronx River Alliance, the Central Park Conservancy, City Parks Foundation, Fort Totten Park Trust, Friends of the High Line, Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York Restoration Project, Riverside Park Fund, Battery Conservancy, Prospect Park Alliance, and Staten Island Greenbelt Conservancy.

Perhaps the best known of these is the Central Park Conservancy, founded in 1980, but I wouldn’t say that in Brooklyn, where the Prospect Park Alliance has been bringing essential support to that jewel in the crown of Olmsted and Vaux parks since 1987. Many of these are complicated partnerships themselves, like the Bronx River Alliance that works with over 30 community-based organizations and another 30-plus non-governmental organizations to protect, improve and restore the Bronx River Corridor. HHT is similarly and very intimately allied with the local not-for-profits that manage the 23 historic sites in our mutual care. Put them all together and it is an expansive network indeed.

Many of these nonprofits were founded in the 1980s when the city’s fiscal crisis and years of brutally heavy use of our parks left them severely wounded. Those of us, including myself, who were around then could not have imagined how important these then fledgling support organizations would become for the city’s parks system.

HHT is proud to be one of the Parks Partners, and proud to be able to report that since our founding in 1989 we have raised over $49,000,000 in capital revenue, with 16 active projects in 2012 alone. In addition, in 2011, the combined operating budgets of HHT and the nonprofits that manage the historic sites exceeded $9,000,000, not counting the incalculable value of the volunteer time donated. Individually HHT’s 23 historic houses may be small, but they pack quite an economic wallop! As always, we are profoundly grateful to the many elected officials whose grants make the capital work possible, and the private citizens, corporations, and foundations who sustain our organization.
WHAT DO tide, tape, flag, coat, wine, scare, sky, sea, meat, ink, wood, ant, letter, carpet, and death have in common? Nothing, in plain black and white. But color them “red,” that operatic, transformative hue that can stop us in our tracks or make us swoon, and voila: three scarlet letters later, there’s the history of the world. Noun, adjective, and verb, the word red conveys countless shades of meaning depending on its context. Whether carmine, vermilion, scarlet, blood, ruby, rose, garnet, blush, or some other variation, red conveys firepower—metaphysical, metaphorical, sexual, economic, social, political, and religious.

The story of red is a story of culture, chemistry, and commerce. And from the rare and delicate cerise wool Kashmir shawl belonging to Eliza Grace King Halsey in King Manor’s collection to the tough and strictly functional turn-of-the-century brilliant red twill-tapestry fireman’s shirt at Staten Island’s Historic Richmond Town, that story is splashed across HHT’s houses.

Whether animal, vegetable, or mineral in origin, red is no easy color to come by—even if it is commonly considered the color of easy virtue. Archaeological evidence suggests that our Neolithic forebears used red-colored, powdered mineral pigments, among them ochre, cinnabar, and hematite, to paint on the walls of their caves. Their descendants in Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, and Mesoamerica rubbed those same kinds of colored powders into their textiles before discovering how to create a range of bright reds to swoony purple dyes from what they had to hand: plants such as madder and safflower, tropical trees, and Mediterranean and South American mollusks. The ancient Chinese secrets of red also seem to have come from powdered mineral pigments, as well as some form of madder.

At some point in the centuries BCE, some clever proto-Matisse, some inventive antecedent of Pantone, Benjamin Moore, or Windsor & Newton, figured out how to extract a truly brilliant crimson from certain parasitic insects of the family Coccidea—the leaf-eating bug known variously as kermes, lac, and the carminic acid-producing cochineal—related species of which exist in many places around the world. As Victoria Finlay writes in Color: A Natural History of the Palette, “This little insect was big business. Since the Ancient Egyptians had started importing it by the camel-load from Persia and Mesopotamia, the kermes trade routes had increased to cover the known world, from Europe to China. The Romans liked it so much that they would sometimes demand that taxes should be paid in sacks of kermes.” By the Middle Ages, she
continues, “kermes was one of the most expensive dyes in Europe.”

Cut to the Age of Discovery, and the dawn of an expanding global economy. When Spanish conquistadors reached the Pacific, they discovered gold and red—nearly as valuable as gold—in the form of an indigenous, ancient (dating at least to the second century BCE) cochineal industry in Mexico and Central and South America. The cochineal there, a different species, thrived on the nopal, or prickly pear cactus, and gave a higher yield of carminic acid per insect. The cochineal business exploded. “In 1575 alone about 80 metric tons of red arrived in Spain in the form of dried brown pellets, on what became known as the cochineal fleet,” Finlay asserts. Similar shipments over the next 25 years amounted to “several trillion insect bodies every year.”

Says Linda Eaton, Director of Collections and Senior Curator of Textiles at the Winterthur Museum, “Insect dyes made from bugs existed before the Spanish brought them from South America. The kicker was that it took an awful lot of bugs to get that bright red, so it was the most expensive color. The cochineal from South America gave much more bang for their bug. Though it was expensive, you needed a lot less. It was very popular not just in Europe, but was exported also to the Middle and Far East. It made the dyers’ lives so much easier.”

Once exclusive to royalty and the Church in the form of luxurious silks and woofs, red became more available in the 18th century thanks to the Spanish cochineal monopoly. Despite that trickle-down effect, it remained a marker of quality, privilege, and power. British redcoats—such as those depicted in the Old Stone House’s diorama of the Battle of Brooklyn—clarify that point. Says Eaton: “The officers’ red coats would have been significantly different, of much better cloth, than those of the foot soldiers. The big shots would have had theirs dyed with cochineal. The cheaper ones would have been dyed with madder. What is so hard to recapture now is the shades of red, which are so affected by the quality of the material and the dyes themselves.”

Colorful detailing on uniforms—elaborate braids, for instance, accoutrements such as the Marquis de Lafayette’s tricolor ribbon sash now in the collection of King Manor, or the red hearts of valor, red placket, and cuffs that make the Marylander’s uniform in the collection of the Old Stone House so distinctive—helps establish identity and rank, whether for members of the military or those in livery. And as the tailored red jacket so popular in women’s fashion in the ’70s, ’80s, and ’90s, Eaton asks: “What’s that about, if not power?”

In the late 18th century, dyers mastered the formula for red and began using it to print on cotton. “Turkey red,” one branch on the red tree, says Eaton, “is based on madder, not cochineal. It’s a way of getting a very brilliant red, but it takes lots of steps, and involves oils and milks. Once they figured it out chemically, they were able to speed up the process. In France and Britain, they produced it in quantity. It started as highly desirable, then went down the scale to cowboy bandannas.” No doubt, it went down to the wool fireman’ shirt belonging to volunteer firefighter Richard Neill, now in the
Red was as popular in 18th-century interiors as it was in apparel. In fact, since those Neolithic artists, red has always been a pinnacle of interior chic. “In the Colonial and Federal Periods,” says Rabbit Goody, a textile historian, “red with green, with black, with blue, and with gold are the major color pairings.” Goody, who owns and operates Thistle Hill Weavers, a custom mill where she weaves commissioned reproductions of 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century fabrics, trims, and carpets on period looms for private residences and the movie industry, adds: “Reds were especially popular on silks, worsted wools, and carpets, though not so much on linens and cottons. Silks and worsted wools take dyes easily, and lend themselves to interiors because they drape well, and they last. By the 19th century there was a huge palette available. The colors were strong colors. Red, in general, was easily obtainable, easy to make fast, and largely part of the normal aesthetic. That makes sense when you add in the cultural perspective. We come from the Anglo-Scots-Irish tradition and the German tradition, which use blue, white, green, red, and yellow in all their various forms.”

While Goody doesn’t do upholstery per se, she does do windows—or, more accurately, window treatments and bed hangings. She notes that, by the mid-18th and into the 19th century, “you almost always see contrasting trims. Trims are important. If there’s red damask, then there will be gold trim.” The Merchant’s House Museum attests to that aesthetic rule, with its vividly aspirational, 19th-century-style red and gold décor in both the parlor and master bedroom. While the bedroom hangings are fashioned from a bolt of fabric that dates to between 1850 and 1875, found in the house’s attic when it became a museum in 1936, those in the parlor are contemporary iterations of the originals. Says Ed Goodman, the Tassel Maker at Scalamandre, a New York-based textile house that recreated and donated the parlor’s English silk damask draperies and French silk and wool tassels: “The damask in the parlor was originally installed upside down, so the curator opted to hang the reproductions that way also. The tassels are a combination of wool and silk, which is very unusual. Most tassels are done all in silk. When you turn these tassels upside down, the wooden extensions of the mold are covered in red silk damask, probably the same red damask as the drapery. It’s the first restoration that I ever saw like that, and it looks like a woman wearing fancy underpants.”

Chemical dyes long ago replaced cochineal in the textile industries, but this old-fashioned red has not completely disappeared. In fact, it has been reincarnated in the food additive E120, where it lends its hue to various foods and cosmetics. Yet everything old becomes new again: there’s a revival of interest in cochineal and in natural dyes, particularly in Oaxaca, Mexico, where the Spanish discovered the New World cochineal centuries ago. Jungle red, or more properly carmine, is making a comeback, and the past meets the present in brilliantly colored flames.
NEW EXHIBIT AT OLD STONE HOUSE

In conjunction with the recent opening of Washington Park's historically-themed playground on May 11, the Old Stone House (OSH) is developing a new exhibit about the Battle of Brooklyn. It will trace the impact of the battle on local citizens throughout the rest of the Revolutionary War, helping to make a connection between the past and OSH's local community today.

With funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, American Express, the Maryland Sons of the American Revolution, and individual donors, OSH is working with Janet Rassweiler (New Jersey Historical Society) and Ellen Snyder Grenier (Castle Williams/Governor's Island) to develop the content for an installation that will be designed and fabricated by May & Watkins, who most recently completed the celebrated EatSleepPlay exhibit for the Children's Museum of Manhattan. Historians Patricia Bonomi, Edwin Burrows, and Barnet Schecter were instrumental in the interpretive planning process. OSH is currently raising the final $150,000 necessary to complete the $300,000 project, which is expected to be installed in spring 2013.

THE PAINTED FACE OF MADAME JUMEL

BY DEBORAH KRULEWITCH, CHAIR EMERITA & CAROL WARD, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, MORRIS-JUMEL MANSION MUSEUM

WETHER IN THE 21ST or the 19th century, women have worked hard to appear naturally beautiful. However, make-up aficionados of today might be surprised to learn of the importance, or rather the infamy, of make-up 200 years ago. Eliza Jumel, the longtime mistress of the Morris-Jumel Mansion, had experience with a wide variety of make-ups, cosmetics, and perfumes that were both common and risqué for a woman in the 19th century.

The word cosmetic derives from the Greek kosmetik tekhn, meaning “technique of dress and ornament.” These techniques changed with time, and the way a woman ornamented herself with make-up served as an outward sign of breeding, social class, and status. During Eliza’s time, make-up styles went from one extreme to the other: red lips and heavily rouged cheeks became passé and a more “natural” look took over. Over the course of her life, Eliza experienced both sides of the coin.

Raised, rumor has it, in a “dissolute household” and employed (this we know for certain) as an actress in her early life, Madame Jumel was exposed to and no doubt utilized make-ups of the most colorful kind—cosmetics scorned by ladies of “polite society.” She eventually left the theater, married wealthy wine merchant Stephen Jumel, moved into the Morris (now called Morris-Jumel) Mansion, and commenced her second career as a fashionable New York City socialite. On entering “polite society,” Madam Jumel’s make-up habits changed; she abandoned the flashy and deeply made-up face of her acting days for the more subtle palette employed by the leisureed women of the upper classes.

By the second half of the century, make-up was frowned upon generally, especially during the 1870s, when social etiquette became more rigid. In fact, Queen Victoria even publicly declared it improper and vulgar. Women were thought of as fragile: they compared themselves to delicate flowers and emphasized their delicacy and femininity. Although heartily condemned by moralists and Victoria herself, women no doubt employed a judicious use of cosmetics to achieve this look of pale, natural beauty. The white face paint of the past, applied by women to appear as young and perfect porcelain dolls, was replaced by zinc oxide and chalk, which was less opaque and more natural looking. (The white paint, incidentally, was made from lead and thus highly toxic.) The new tinted foundations, more similar to what we use today, gave women a “fresher” look. To complete the illusion of pale and fragile beauty, women even went so far as to paint their neckline with fine blue lines to make their skin seem light and translucent.

In the creation of this artistic illusion, powder was permissible. The most common varieties were made of rice flour; more expensive versions used fine...
talcum. For a glossy or shiny-looking pearl finish, women employed a brilliant white powder made of finely ground bismuth (the same mineral found in modern highlighters). Rouge was also one of the few accepted cosmetics that survived the middle of the century. It came in several shades, and the pigment was usually bright red carmine, made from cochineal insects dissolved in alum water, or rose pink safflower in varying combinations. Sometimes muriate of tin was used, which produced a vivid red color (as it seeped unhealthily into the applicant’s skin). Powder blushes were the most common, but, like today, liquid or cream rouge existed as well. Sometimes rouge was sold in sheets: these crepons were made of thin crepe paper dipped in make-up. The make-up was rich in pigment, so a delicate hand was needed during the application in order to create a natural look.

Fancy lotions to assist with fresh, glowing skin also became popular, but it’s doubtful whether they were any more efficacious than such everyday home remedies as crushed strawberries and cucumbers. An emphasis was placed on a lady’s complexion: the texture of her skin and the color of her cheeks were deemed as important, if not more so, than her other features. To appear the picture of health, women would “take the air” to exercise, something that was looked down on a century before.

Eyes were another story. Dilated eyes were deemed attractive, and to achieve this look, women sometimes applied drops of the poisonous plant belladonna (leading occasionally to blindness). Trade and exploration in the Far East also produced a new craze for mascara and eyeliner. Mixing fine black soot with a little oil created a paste that could be applied both to the eyebrows and the eyelashes. All of the cosmetics available, however, those for the eye were the most frowned upon, probably because of the difficulty in application: a natural look was hard to accomplish.

Similarly, few cosmetics were as visually outstanding as lipstick, and bold was bad. As a 19th century source states, “Nothing but selfish vanity, and falsehood of mind, could prevail on a woman ... to lacker [sic] her lips with vermillion.” However, it’s likely that most women in the 19th century used some type of lip-coloring. One popular cosmetic was rose lip salve, available from any drug store, and chiefly containing white wax, almond oil, alkanet to color, and roses for scent. This type of lip rouge gave the lips a somewhat transparent, rosy glow, rather like modern lip glosses. For bright red lips, women used vermillion, an opaque paste made from cochineal insects. This created a more painted (and more scandalous) look, similar to that of lipsticks today.

Perfumes were also very popular, and much more acceptable than cosmetics. Women like Madame Jumel would have had special decorative bottles made just to hold their various fragrances.
ALICE AUSTEN: LIGHT & DARK

BY CARL RUTBERG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALICE AUSTEN HOUSE MUSEUM

Alice Austen has been remembered as a wealthy, turn of the century photographer and progressive woman. Until the Great Depression, Austen lived an idyllic life; yet, due to the economic crisis of the 1930s, Austen lost her fortune, and eventually her home was foreclosed. Penniless, she was forced to move to the county poorhouse. There, Oliver Jensen, a LIFE magazine editor, discovered her and her work. He managed to sell a few of Austen’s images, earning her enough money to move to a nursing home where she died in 1952.

The widespread effects of the current housing crisis on the American landscape are examined through a collection of imagery and multimedia pieces by ten artists and photographers in Foreclosed: Documents from the American Housing Crisis. They depict the ruins of rich and poor neighborhoods, as well as the families affected by the economic downturn. The exhibition raises questions about the ties between home ownership and personal freedom within the convention.

AUSTEN’S (1866 – 1952) first camera was little more than a box made out of mahogany. It was up to the eleven-year-old aspiring photographer to prepare the glass plate negative, attach the lens, and decide how much light to let in.

Every plate Austen exposed became a lesson, and she took careful notes. Almost all negative sleeves are marked with the place, date, and hour as well as with weather condition, type of lens, and how long it was open: “Parker Lens, Stop 32, 2 secs. Sunny day,” for example. And when she later began to manipulate light by throwing sun on an object by using a looking glass, or closing the blinds for an interior shot, she of course noted that too. Not surprisingly, some envelopes are marked “Mistake!”

Exposing the glass plate, however, did not provide a photograph make, and to complete the process Austen went into her closet. The darkroom, located on the second floor of Clear Comfort, her family home, was equipped with an oil lamp that Austen had covered with red fabric to create infrared light, as well as with the necessary chemicals, which she mixed herself. The challenge, however, was to determine how much light each negative required. Too much or too little, and she would have another mistake.

Austen learned by looking—by observing the effects of a passing cloud, an approaching thunderstorm, or the shadows cast by the sun’s movement. And since she grew up during a time of relatively little artificial light, it was possible for her to, on a moonless night, experience darkness, a darkness that today can only be found far from metropolitan areas.

In 1882, however, the Pearl Street power plant opened in Lower Manhattan. At first it generated enough electricity to fire up 400 lamps, but within two years that number had increased to 10,000. The darkness Austen was used to was pierced by first a flicker and soon by a steady stream of light. For someone as sensitive as Austen it must have been a thrilling experience. But it was also a sign that the world was changing.

Over the following two decades, Austen spent much time documenting the world that was arriving and the one that was disappearing. Surprisingly—because so many of those who belonged to her class feared the new—Austen’s images were not critical: neither immigrant nor machine threatened her. She did not use light to darken her Lower East Side images, as, for example, Lewes Hines did. In the same manner, she did not romanticize life on Staten Island by flooding her negatives with light. She avoids the National Romantic style favored by photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron.

For Alice Austen, the new and old—Manhattan and Staten Island—had been separated by the Narrows, but in 1901 the two collided. With its Spanish Renaissance architecture, rich with balconies, loggias, and minarets, Buffalo’s Pan-American Exposition attracted millions of visitors. But Austen, who was by then well traveled, had seen the real thing and was not interested in World Fair’s copies: she had came to see the “City of Light.” Powered by Niagara Falls, thousands and thousand of light bulbs illuminated the buildings, creating a stage with a spectacle the like of which Austen had never seen. A lit-up night, a union of light and dark, what a challenge!

She likely brought with her two cameras, a number of lenses, and a tripod. Over the course of a few nights, she captured about 25 images. Back in her darkroom, she must have been very pleased with the result. The excitement is still palpable in the photographs today.

At the time, however, it was probably the technical, not the aesthetic, success that Austen valued. To better understand her achievement, it helps to know that a British photographer named Paul Martin had captured the very first nighttime images only five years earlier. A year after that Alfred Stieglitz took some of the first nighttime photos of New York. And then came Alice Austen. Unfortunately, it was enough for her to know that she had triumphed. To announce it, to boast, was gauche and vulgar, better suitable for men and merchants. Instead, she left the task of bragging to the Alice Austen House.

A few years after her trip to Buffalo, Austen and Gertrude Tate, her partner, travelled to Sweden. There, on a summer night, they experienced the midnight sun. How thrilled she must have been. How sad that her photographs did not survive.
of the American dream. What does it mean to own a home today, and how do we move towards a recovery?

The Alice Austen House Museum provides a unique domestic setting to view the haunting imagery of lives now abandoned. The homes, personified through the dreams and hopes of their former owners, have been left to decompose. Artists such as Todd Hido capture what has been left behind in these homes, while documentary photographers like John Moore capture the emotional stories of those most affected. In essence, what has remained is a stark and vast wasteland filled with eerie reminders of what was lost. Juxtaposing Austen’s history and home with photographs depicting the current crisis, the exhibition offers a unique setting to connect the crisis of the Great Depression with the current recession.

This exhibition is generously funded by the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Board of Trustees of the Alice Austen House Museum, and the Alice Austen House Membership.
LEWIS HOWARD LATIMER & THE COLOR OF LIGHT

BY JOHN D. BULLOUGH, LIGHTING RESEARCH CENTER, RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

INETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA is remembered as the source of many inventions that still define everyday life in the 21st century: the telephone, the elevator, air conditioning, and, of course, the ubiquitous light bulb. That a single person could have been involved in the development of all of these advances seems impossible. That Lewis Howard Latimer, son of fugitive slaves and with little formal education, could be that person, speaks to his creative genius.

Latimer's contributions to lighting through refinements of the incandescent light bulb still resonate today. Shortly after Thomas Edison received his first light bulb patent, many companies emerged to capitalize on this new technology. Latimer's drafting skills attracted the attention of entrepreneur Hiram Maxim, who hired him for the U.S. Electric Light Company. Latimer quickly learned electrical engineering, becoming a significant contributor to the company's research and development efforts.

When first invented, light bulbs might last a few dozen hours before failing, a major obstacle to their adoption over gas and candle lighting. Latimer patented designs for lamps and for manufacturing carbon filaments. By passing a current through the filament, it becomes so hot that it glows. This incandescence gives light bulbs their name. Filaments based on Latimer's improvements would last hundreds, rather than dozens of hours. Latimer's innovations also include still-common threaded sockets, as well as glassblowing and manufacturing equipment needed to make incandescent lighting a standardized commodity.

Through the 1880s as lighting companies formed, failed, and merged, the “Latimer lamp” emerged as a culmination of his innovations. By 1885 Latimer was working for the Edison Electric Light Company and later, for the General Electric Company. In addition to his engineering expertise, Latimer provided legal guidance to help Edison defend patent infringements. He also maintained the Edison Company's technical library.

Undoubtedly, Latimer's contributions to light bulbs helped make them mainstream. Carbon filaments based on Latimer’s techniques remained state-of-the-art until the 1920s when tungsten, more durable but based on the same principle of incandescence, was used. With the emergence of newer, more efficient sources such as compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) and light-emitting diodes (LEDs) as well as new legislation to phase out the familiar light bulb, we might wonder whether Latimer's influences still matter.

They do matter, especially in how we measure light and color. We use two important yardsticks for describing the color properties of light. One is the color temperature. You may have heard of “warm” or “cool” white lamps, or noticed that as a light bulb is dimmed, the filament color shifts from white to yellow to red. This color shift can be quantified in terms of the temperature of the filament material. If the temperature is 2,000 degrees Celsius, the filament will appear yellow. At 3,000 degrees Celsius, the filament will be white. Paradoxically, the “warmer” color tone, yellow, comes from a “cooler” filament. Even for fluorescent lamps and LEDs, which no
longer use incandescence to produce light, color temperature still describes how warm or cool a light appears, based on its color similarity to a filament of a given temperature.

Indeed, as lighting in our homes has evolved from flame sources, to incandescent and halogen lamps, to fluorescent lights and LEDs, the color of the light has evolved too. Color temperatures have mostly increased over the past decades. The carbon filaments in Latimer's lamp had similar color temperatures to a yellowish flame. Incandescent lamps with tungsten filaments have higher color temperatures and thus produce whiter light. Still newer lights have even higher color temperatures, as much as 6,000 degrees Celsius.

This means that warm-toned home décor that looked rich and vibrant under gas or incandescent light a century ago might look less vivid under modern lights with higher color temperatures. To recreate the yellowish light from yesteryear in historic houses, new technologies must be modified, as in the Merchant’s House Museum, where gas chandeliers were fitted with fiber optics to give visitors a better sense of the low, flickering light that once lit the parlors.

The other yardstick for relating lighting to color is the color rendering index. This is a measure of how natural objects of different colors will appear under a lamp, relative to an “ideal” light source. If you’ve ever bought clothing and found it to be a different color after bringing it home or wearing it to work, you’ve experienced this index. The “ideal” lamp is defined to have a color rendering index of 100. Any lamp that makes colors look different from the ideal will have a lower index. Older fluorescent lamps had color rendering indices of 50 to 60; newer ones can exceed a value of 80. Importantly, the incandescent bulb’s index is 100, because this was judged as the ideal “natural” lamp under most electric lighting situations. Therefore any lamp that makes colors look different than they would appear under an incandescent bulb, by definition, has a color rendering index less than 100.

Color temperature and color rendering index, both crucial yardsticks for light and color, owe their existence to the widespread success of light bulbs in the early 20th century, a success that continues in most homes. The success of light bulbs as reliable, mass-produced household items owes much to Latimer’s innovations. Without them, electric lighting and our conceptions of light and color could be very different than they are today.

Lewis Latimer’s creative genius was recognized in 2001 by General Electric Lighting when they sponsored a scholarship and a renovation of the Lewis Howard Latimer Research Conference Room at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute’s Lighting Research Center, itself housed within a National Historic Landmark building in Troy, NY. Latimer’s granddaughter, Dr. Winifred Latimer Norman, attended the dedication, paying tribute to Latimer’s achievements as inspiration for new discoveries in the realm of light and color.
E THINK a lot about color and historic houses: is the hue historically appropriate? Are the walls painted according to the original color scheme? Can a modern paint tell the story of the room authentically? If the original color is ugly, can we change it and make it pretty?

It's easy to understand the importance of color in historic houses. People come to be transported back in time and to try to experience the past. The rich umber that practically illuminates the dining room of the Rufus King Manor is transcendent, evoking images of the dinner parties of Senator King and his family. From the bright red of the Little Red Lighthouse to the rich cerulean blues in the study at Gracie Mansion, color inside and out affixes images in our minds.

But color can be understood as more than a palette of hues. Color is also a social construct—in both good and bad ways—that can help us make sense of historical interpretations as well as guide historic preservation. Discussions of color on historic houses often leave out discussions of color in and around historic houses. The 23 houses in HHT’s collection are largely located in the ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods of the City. In many communities, as the demographics change and older residents leave and newer ones move in, the houses are a source of continuity, tying the past with the present. For example, the neighborhood surrounding Bowne, Kingsland, and Latimer houses in Queens began as a Dutch area, later becoming home to a multitude of immigrants, first from across Europe, then from Latin America, and then from across Asia. The visitors to the houses are as diverse as the City itself. New York City public schoolchildren, the lion’s share of the under-18 visitors, represent almost 200 different countries and a full spectrum of colors.

Though we may not want to admit it, color (and, by extension, race) plays a large role in our understanding of contemporary and historic experience in the United States. Some might argue that it plays a larger role than in other places, perhaps because of the rich diversity of the American people, especially in New York. Already in the 1650s, New York was home to people from more than 50 countries, representing a concentration of more shades of skin color in one place, even then, than had ever been known to man.

Color has usually been understood as a proxy for race and certainly remains one of the dominant prisms through which to understand and examine American life. However, a number of studies have proposed moving away from racial constructs imposed by society to actual pigmentation scales, arguing that it is not belief in a biologic construct that generates discrimination, but rather a hierarchic ranking of preference based on color pigmentation.
Jennifer Hochschild of Harvard University proposed a color pigmentation scale be used when conducting research to help understand social issues. This scale was incorporated into such studies as the New Americans Project housed at the University of Pennsylvania, the only study of its kind to examine the social and political integration of legal permanent residents (green card holders). Researchers were given a palette with different colors, much like paint chips in a hardware store, and asked to match the color in the palette with the perceived color of the study participant. The hope was to go beyond “race” and to see how color itself affects behavior, perception, and experience in integration into American life.

The idea of studying color and race as constructs can sometimes be complicated. In Germany, because of Nazi obsession with race and physical representations of race, it is complicated to talk about race at all. The term “race” is used for breed of dogs and the like, but not for people. There, Germans would be inclined to discuss Hautfarbe or “skin color.” In fact, when conducting research in Germany I asked German social scientists how to include a question about race for a survey only to be told, “maybe you look at the person and write down what you think they are when they aren’t looking.” Still, other places have simply discarded race as a remnant of 19th-century junk science. Yet, as globalization becomes the norm and many ethnic states that have never contended with immigration are becoming a home for immigrants from across the globe, their governments and social scientists are searching for frameworks that can help them understand social phenomena and, lacking anything better for the moment, are returning to the idea of race and color as explanatory variables.

By exploring and highlighting the issues of color with respect to the people who inhabited the houses, we may better understand their society and community. The story of Lewis Latimer, son of fugitive slaves and one of the foremost inventors of his time, can provide unique insight into the role of race in the history of business, science, and industrial development. Color was likely hotly debated in HHT houses, as several were home to abolitionists. Rufus King gave his fieriest speech against the admission of Missouri as a slave state 40 years before the Civil War. Similarly, Mary King Murray of Kingsland Homestead was a women’s rights and anti-slavery advocate in Flushing, the birthplace of tolerance—the 1657 Flushing Remonstrance was the first declaration of the right to religious freedom in the world, at a time when religious groups were thought of as representing ethnic differences. The Bowne House and the Hendrick I. Lott House also are said to have been sites on the Underground Railroad.

At the houses, color is the starting place to begin talking about politics, rhetoric, and civic engagement. The Old Stone House showcases a deed to the land ceded by Native Americans to the Dutch settlers. In 1645, just a few years later, those same landholders would massacre the Lenape Indians in what is now Jersey City, forever pushing them out of the New York area and setting the stage for questions of land ownership, groups’ rights, and sovereignty that continue today. Conference House Park reportedly has one of the most intact Native American Indian burial grounds on the East Coast. The garden at Bartow-Pell Mansion is filled with the plants and herbs of traditional medicines from a multiethnic past. We know that some of the houses employed slaves, and others, servants who emigrated from around the world, who were not considered “white,” the level of status that determined the legal right to naturalize. They were denied citizenship, the opportunity to work, and the right to own property. At the houses, their stories help to frame discussions of immigration, labor, and private law. Is it even possible to ignore color issues and still see the houses?

The HHT houses offer a chance to use color as a bridge between communities across time, tying the present to the past. Not long ago, for example, these came together at the Latimer House. Upon hearing the news of the election of President Obama, a Chinese family came to visit, explaining that they wanted to celebrate such a historic moment at a place in their neighborhood symbolizing African-American achievement. Clearly, the houses allow us to tell stories that help us make sense of our history and experience. Perhaps by using color as a vehicle, we can pass this meaning on to future generations and the ever-changing communities that perpetually spring up around the houses.
In 2009 several items of the collection went for conservation treatment, including Eliza Gracie King Halsey's cerise Kashmir shawl and a ribbon fragment of the Marquis de Lafayette's tricolor sash. These objects were red-flagged as priorities for their deteriorating condition.

The shawl was cleaned by hand vacuuming and restored by contact humidification flattening and cleaning on a suction table. The silk of the ribbon fragment is extremely thin and brittle with severe dye fading, so it was pressure-mounted into a new gilt frame.

The Conservation Treatment Grant Program, administered by the Greater Hudson Heritage Network, provided funding for the project. Conservation treatment was performed by textile conservator Mary Kaldany at Textile Conservation Workshop.

The reputation of "Poet of Blackness" might seem to be a fitting evaluation of Edgar Allan Poe. Indeed, the casual reader might select black as the single most important color symbol in all of Poe's verse. Surprisingly, however, the specific color adjective "black" is found only six times in his body of work. The fact that Poe's verse is considered "black" is because of impression rather than instance, suggesting the use of color symbolism in his poetry. Poe's verse is generously enhanced with color. However, actual color words are relatively few. Color is often suggested rather than named.

Poe wrote during a time when Symbolism as a literary movement was beginning to take shape. His favorite themes were gothic, exotic, and introspective, themes which lent themselves to symbolic development. His use of color symbolism may not have been his primary object, however. For Poe, the "effect" was the primary concern of the poet. The method of achieving this "effect," through color words or other means, was a means to an end.

Yet Poe must have been aware of the black backdrop of mood and tone against which many of his poems were projected. Such a backdrop would necessarily contrast or complement every other color mentioned, thereby affecting the symbolic value of the color words. Let's take a look at those colors and the impression they create in Poe's careful hand.

**BLACK**

While Poe rarely labels anything "black" in his poetry, it creeps into its moods and evocative impressions nonetheless. "Night," "death," "the grave," and "shadow" are common features in the settings of Poe's poetry which suggest blackness. The suggested blackness of darkness, for example, seems to represent a blurred vision of the past in at least five of Poe's poems, including "The Raven" and "The Sleeper." The dark undertones of blackness, moreover, serve to highlight color words as they are used, as in these lines from "Lenore":

```
The life upon her yellow hair but not within her eyes—
The life still there, upon her hair—the death upon her eyes.
```

The intimation of a halo effect of living yellow against the black of death was surely intended by Poe. Black as it is frequently suggested in death or darkness, may be the cornerstone of meaning for the actual color words in Poe's verse, even though the number of actual color adjectives naming black are few.

**GRAY**

Poe seems to use "gray" in a symbolic function similar to that of "black." Both indicate some sort of boundary between contrasting conditions. "Black" most often separates states of mind: memory from
present perception, fantasy from reality. “Gray” seems more to represent the division between power and impotence or life and death.

**WHITE**
With this color, adjectives typically replace the actual color, with words such as snowy, silver, and pearly representing white. However, purity and innocence, the traditional meanings suggested by white symbolism, do not form the basis of Poe’s use of the color. Instead, “white” generally represents an almost Platonic concept of the shadow of reality. In other words, white seems to affect the manner in which reality is perceived; reality is seen as reflected or transformed into some imperfect entity. White light, often moonlight, gives an otherworldly illumination. In “Eulalie,” for example, the ethereal quality of moonlight adds to the impression of an introspective reverie rather than a clearly illumined reality.

**GOLD**
Color adjectives which refer to gold are the most frequently used color words in Poe’s poetry. Following more traditional connotations, “gold” for Poe typically represents value and beauty. The relationship between “gold” and beauty is evident in “The Bells”: the “molten golden notes” from the “golden bells” clearly refer to the mellow, mature beauty of a marriage relationship. In “Lenore,” on the other hand, the young girl is a “golden bowl,” or vessel of great worth.

**YELLOW**
The examples of yellow color words are clearly divided into two groups: hair, and the glow of some supernatural moon. Both groups typically indicate some lost beauty or vitality.

**PURPLE**
While blue and its connotations do not typically find their way into his poetry, Poe seems particularly consistent in his use of the colors violet and purple. With their associations with royalty, they most often serve as a dark background to highlight and accentuate some manifestation of beauty.

**GREEN**
For Poe, green kept its literal associations with nature, and therefore the traditional symbolic meanings of “fertility” or “life force.” In “To One in Paradise,” for example, the fertility of the island is suggestive of the physical relationship between lovers.

**RED**
Last but certainly not least, Poe looks to red for its darker shades of meaning. Its overall symbolism may be presumed to be the representation of evil. Red variously serves as the color for Hell, the hue of the serpent, Satan, and the tint which suggests destruction, perversity, and lust. Across Poe’s poems, red very nearly pulses with pure evil.

While Poe did not use color symbolism as the most important element of his poetic style, it certainly plays a role in creating the “effect” he intended. His concern with death, loss, melancholy, and the supernatural at the very least call forth mental associations with darkness and blackness. In fact, color symbolism has so thoroughly affected readers’ responses that not only can color suggest specific moods and images, but moods and images may just as surely suggest specific colors to the mind’s eye. This is undoubtedly the case with Poe, indeed the “Poet of Blackness.”

---

**HHT AWARDS AND ACCOLADES**
The NYC Department of Parks & Recreation, The Bronx County Historical Society (BCHS), and HHT together are the recipient of the New York Landmarks Conservancy’s 2012 Lucy G. Moses Award for the restoration of Poe Cottage in The Bronx. The project included a major interior and exterior restoration and structural repairs. The project partners are grateful for funding from City Council Member Joel Rivera and Save America’s Treasures (through BCHS). The Cottage is now open, so please visit!

**HHT** has also received an Award of Merit from Museumwise and the Museum Association of New York for our annual Historic House Festival, “New York City History Never Tasted So Good!” This citywide event, graciously sponsored by Con Edison and The History Channel (with more than 15 other partnering organizations), engages communities across the City in our shared heritage through tours, bike tours, tastings, performances, and more. Plans are underway for a larger and tastier 2012 Fall Festival, coming October 5-7!

Sallie Carothers
INSIDE THIS ISSUE, READ ABOUT...
the remarkable history of red and other colors in products from textiles to lipsticks, controlling light and dark in Alice Austen’s camera, the impact of Lewis Latimer’s incandescent bulb, the color gradient of race, and the use of color in the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe.

PLEASE VISIT WWW.HISTORICHOUSETRUST.ORG OR CALL 212.360.8282 FOR MORE INFORMATION

Lucy G. Moses Award  
Museumwise Award of Merit  
Million Trees at the Conference House