

Mary Shellman Bedroom Interpretive Plan



Presented by: Sarah Coster



SARAH COSTER
MAKING THE PAST PRESENT

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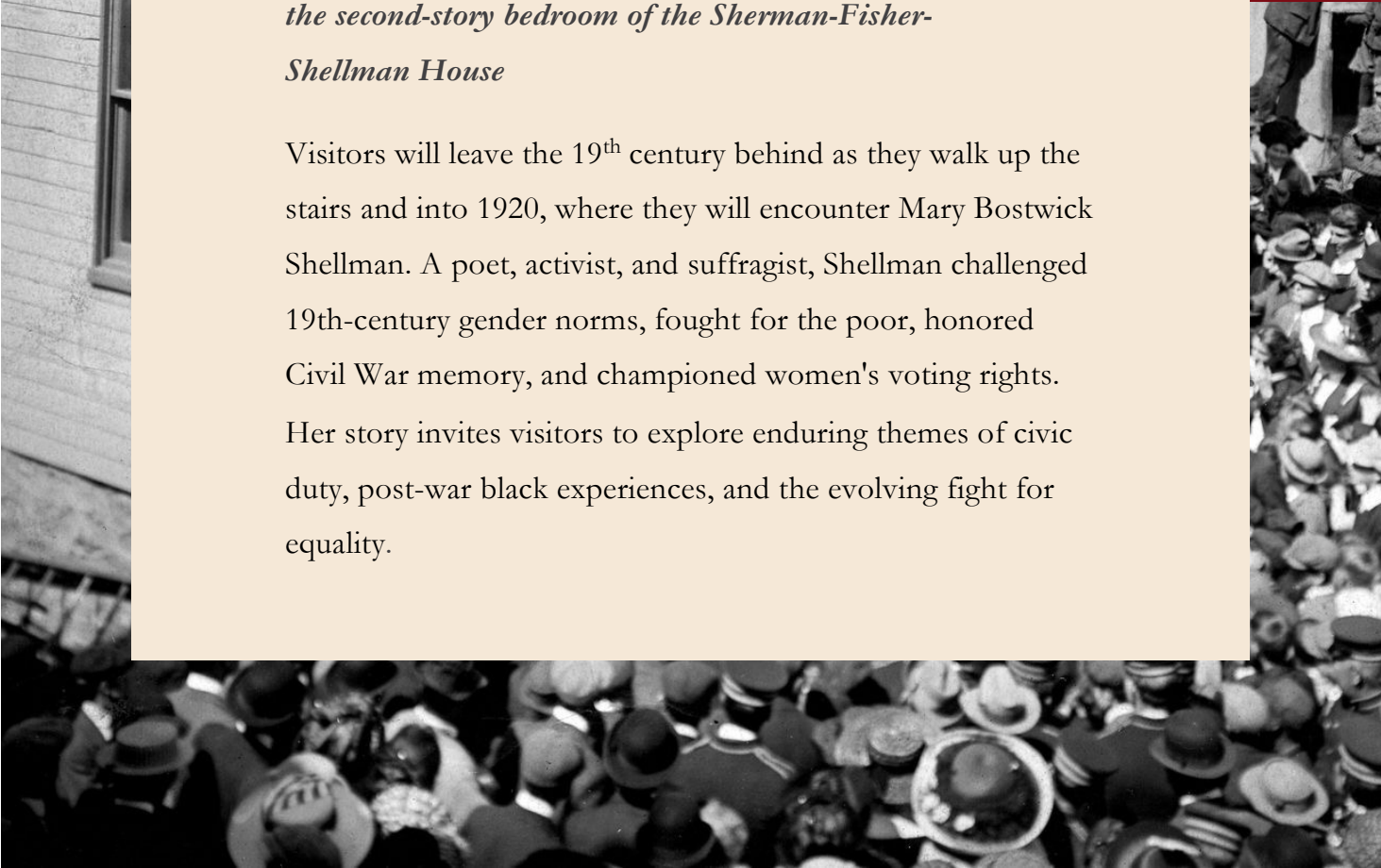




INTRODUCTION

The Mary Shellman: Civil War to Suffrage Interpretive Project will, for the first time in the history of the Historical Society of Carroll County, invite visitors up to the second-story bedroom of the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House

Visitors will leave the 19th century behind as they walk up the stairs and into 1920, where they will encounter Mary Bostwick Shellman. A poet, activist, and suffragist, Shellman challenged 19th-century gender norms, fought for the poor, honored Civil War memory, and championed women's voting rights. Her story invites visitors to explore enduring themes of civic duty, post-war black experiences, and the evolving fight for equality.





Background

MISSION

The Historical Society of Carroll County connects the past to the present and makes the County's vibrant history **tangible, relevant, and meaningful** for today's **diverse** communities and for generations to come.

VISION FOR THE PROJECT

The room will feature never before seen artifacts and manuscripts from Mary Shellman's life. It will highlight her remarkable story as a young woman witnessing the impacts of the Civil War and becoming a leader of the suffragist movement in Maryland in the 1920s. The exhibit will serve as a catalyst for completing interpretations of rooms on the second floor.

A long-awaited invitation to the second story- and the 20th century

The Historical Society of Carroll County's 2023–2025 Strategic Action Plan prioritizes this interpretation, fulfilling a decades-long vision to open the upstairs rooms to the public. With funding from a Maryland Heritage Areas Authority grant, awarded in July 2024, work is now underway. The Interpretive Plan, developed by museum consultant Sarah Coster, in collaboration with staff, board members, and volunteers will define key themes and visitor experiences and plot out interpretive media.

Once finalized, the Interpretive Plan will be reviewed and approved by the Board of the Historical Society of Carroll County. Following approval, the design and creation of any interpretive elements outlined in the plan will begin.

The exhibit will be installed in early spring 2025, with its official opening on Memorial Day 2025, honoring Mary Bostwick Shellman's tireless dedication to creating and preserving the community's Decoration Day Parade, one of the oldest in the country.



PROJECT TEAM



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PERIOD OF INTERPRETATION

1920 – A citizen, honorary veteran and political activist her entire life, Mary Shellman finally won the right to vote at the age of seventy-one.



When visitors go up the staircase at 206 East Main, they will be transported from 1806 to 1920. We chose 1920 as the period of interpretation for the Shellman bedroom because it marks a pivotal moment in Mary Bostwick Shellman's life and the history of her home. In November 1920, 71-year-old Mary opened part of her house as an instruction room for women preparing to vote. These "instruction rooms" were provided by the Republican Party for new women voters near each polling location. They provided sample ballots and assistance via "knowledgeable advocates" such as Mary Shellman. Setting the room to 1920 will allow for dynamic interpretive opportunities, including the exploration of women's equality in the wake of the 19th Amendment's ratification, and Mary Shellman's lifelong role in politics, civics and community activism.

GOAL STATEMENT

The Mary Shellman Bedroom Interpretation seeks to forge a powerful emotional connection with visitors by showcasing the story of an enterprising Carroll County resident whose determination and activism demonstrates how one individual can inspire transformative change, linking local achievements to a broader national impact.

WHAT THEMES ARE

TANGIBLE

Themes connect tangible resources to intangible ideas.

UNDERSTANDABLE

Themes should be easily understood by all.

RELEVANT

Themes should relate to our audience's everyday experiences of the world.

INTERESTING

Themes should be interesting to most if not all visitors.



THEME ONE

CIVIL WAR

THEME STATEMENT

Mary Shellman, who lived through the Civil War as a teenager in the divided border state of Maryland, devoted her life to honoring both its veterans and fallen, and helping her community remember their sacrifices—just as our nation, more than 150 years later, continues to grapple with the war’s lasting impact on national identity, historical memory, and the legacy of slavery.

”

But the chains of the slave were broken,
Ne'er to be joined again.
And the price we paid for Freedom,
Was a million gallant slain.

MARY B. SHELLMAN



STORYLINES

1. Mary cared for wounded soldiers as a teen, leading to a lifetime of aiding Union troops.
2. Mary led one of the nation's longest-running Decoration Day Parades.
3. She urged mourning the dead without honoring the Confederate cause.
4. One of the few honorary female GAR members, Mary Shellman dedicated her life to serving veterans.
5. Mary Shellman's ties with Black women, including Rachel Pye and Mary Key, highlight both progress and racial hierarchies in post-war Maryland.
6. Many freed women, like Mary Key, remained in proximity to their former enslaver's families. She could read but not write, leaving her perspective unknown.

QUESTIONS

1. Mary Shellman found ways large and small to care for and honor service members and veterans. What are ways we can do the same today?
2. How has Memorial Day changed since 18-year-old Mary organized that first "Decoration Day Parade" in 1868? What traditions do we hope are still a part of Carroll County in another 150 years?
3. Even in Mary Shellman's lifetime, remembering the Civil War was becoming politicized. What aspects of American history do we currently struggle to understand, discuss and memorialize? What can we learn from Mary Shellman on how to talk about them?
4. How was Mary Shellman ahead of her time in her views on race? In what ways was she trapped into the "standard" thinking of the time?
5. How might Mary Key have felt raising Mary Shellman and Paul Reese?

THEME ONE: RELATED ARTIFACTS



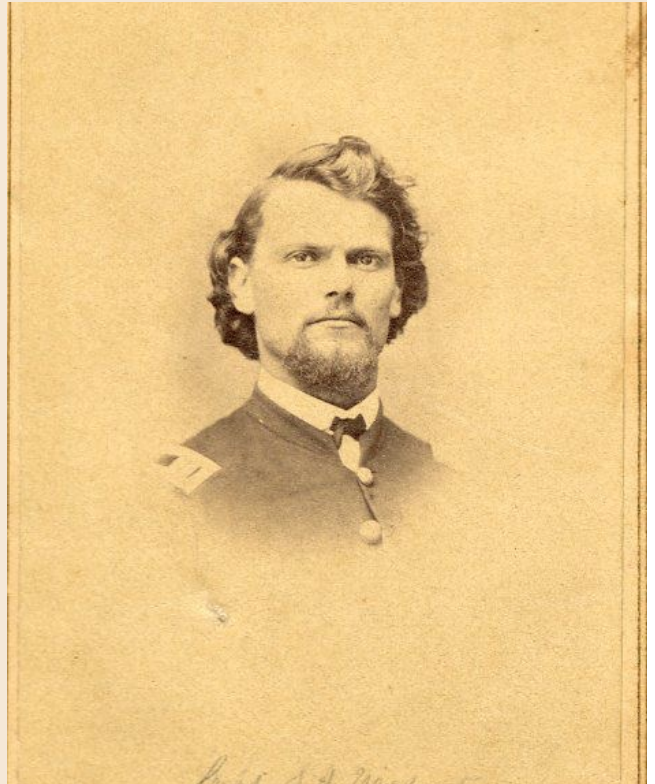
GAR Ribbons and Medals

Mary Shellman was proud of her work with the Grand Army of the Republic and kept her many honors.



Photograph of Rachel Pyc

This photo belonged to Mary. Paul Reese wrote on the back, "Lifelong friend of MBS."



Mary's CDV Collection

Mary treasured her pictures of soldiers she helped and befriended during the War.

Decoration Day Photographs

Visually shows the impact Mary's efforts had on her community.



”

Isn't it an awful thing to be a woman, I can't vote because I am still classed with idiots, criminals and [the] insane...

MARY B. SHELLMAN



THEME TWO

SUFFRAGE

THEME STATEMENT

Mary Shellman's tireless fight for women's suffrage and her efforts to prepare women for the vote in 1920 embody the ongoing American desire to fulfill the Revolutionary promise of equality and to ensure free and fair elections for all.

”

**McKinley is the people's choice
As we can plainly see
His name is now on ev'ry tongue
From Maine to Tennessee**

**GOLD IS THE STANDARD TO WIN
BY MARY B. SHELLMAN, 1896**



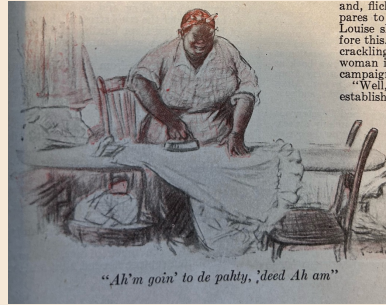
STORYLINES

1. Broke through stereotypes about women in politics
2. Wielded political influence despite not being able to vote; wrote campaign songs that were widely published and performed
3. Served as the first President of the Just Government League of Carroll County, the largest suffrage organization in Maryland
4. Opened an instruction room in her home to assist new voters in 1920
5. Lived in a society that still upheld racial hierarchies, and she did not explicitly advocate for black rights in the same way she did for women's rights

QUESTIONS

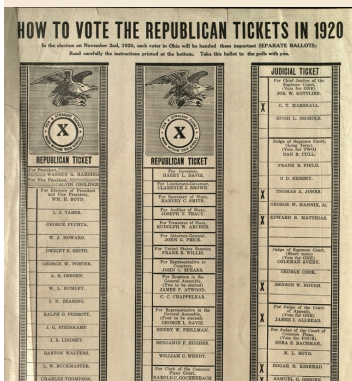
1. What was it like for Mary to write a song that became a very popular campaign song and then not be able to vote in that election?
2. What stereotypes do we still face when it comes to women in political or leadership positions?
3. Why did suffragists struggle to be inclusive of women of all races?
4. What stereotypes have you encountered?

THEME TWO: RELATED ARTIFACTS



November 1920 Magazines and Newspaper

Tell the story of Instruction Rooms and sample ballots.



Political and Campaign Songs

Mary was active in political movements, even publishing a song that was performed during McKinley's campaign.

Sample Ballots

Votes for Women Sash

A central focal point for the story of Mary Shellman's work as a suffragist.





THEME THREE

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

THEME STATEMENT

Mary Shellman's legacy shows that while voting is a fundamental right, true citizenship is defined by service and that through acts of kindness, volunteerism, and dedication to the greater good, we each have the power to strengthen our communities and inspire future generations.



”

I do not claim any great work— but I do feel that my labors and love for my County, my State, and my Country are not entirely lost....But I did not work for glory I worked for results.

Mary B. Shellman

STORYLINES

1. Improved conditions at the Carroll County almshouse , transforming it into a model institution
2. Helped establish the Boy Scouts in Carroll County
3. Volunteered in the Red Cross, earning recognition from Clara Barton
4. Became Westminster's first telephone operator, bringing new technology to the community
5. Enriched the community through theater, poetry, music and historic preservation
6. Helped create Westminster's first public library

QUESTIONS

1. What does civic engagement mean to you?
2. How do you help your community? Giving time and resources to help the poor? Sharing your talent (writing, music, art)? Learning about and sharing history? Honoring veterans and remembering those who gave the ultimate sacrifice?
3. How can being a good citizen go beyond voting?

THEME TWO: RELATED ARTIFACTS



Ascension Episcopal Church

Handcrafted natural art that Mary made of her church and won an award for at a World's Fair



Red Cross Pin

Given by Clara Barton for Mary Shellman's service to her country in times of disaster..



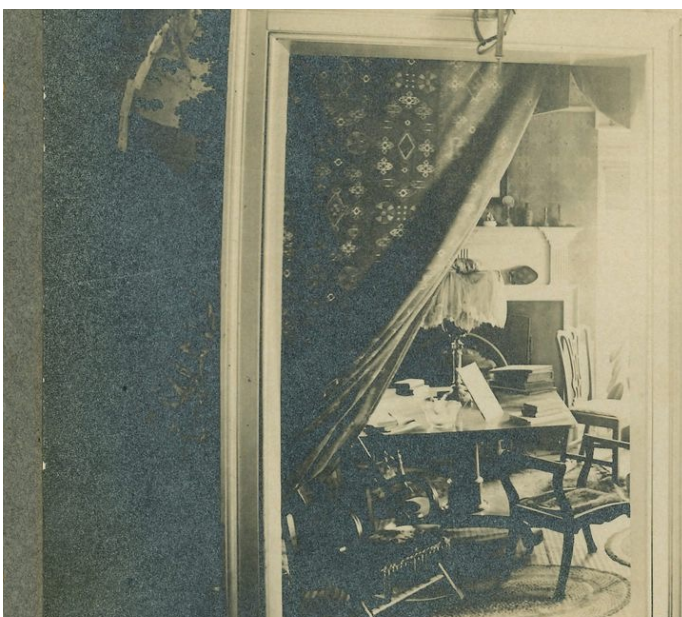
Community Theater Photos

Mary was fondly remembered for always improving every play she was in.

Carroll County Almshouse

A picture that belonged to Mary Shellman, showing female residents of the county almshouse





Furnishings Plan Summary

WHO SLEPT IN THE ROOM?

Mary Shellman's exact bedroom is unknown, but for this interpretation, she likely moved into the largest room around 1898 or 1909 after her mother's or sisters' deaths. She would have been about 50-60 years old when she adapted the space for her own use.

ORIGINAL FURNISHINGS?

In the 1920s and 1930s, Mary Shellman rented the home to Mr. and Mrs. GW Young and corresponded with Mrs. Young to have all her antique furniture sold.

When the Historical Society took over, they documented some of the remaining objects, several of which are still part of the collection and will be displayed in the room.

PERIOD OF INTERPRETATION: November 1920

When visitors go up the staircase at 206 East Main, they will be transported from 1806 to 1920. We chose 1920 as the period of interpretation for the Shellman bedroom because it marks a pivotal moment in Mary Bostwick Shellman's life and the history of her home.

In November 1920, 71-year-old Mary opened her house as an instruction room for women preparing to vote. These "instruction rooms" were provided by the Republican Party for new women voters near each polling location. They provided sample ballots and assistance via "knowledgeable advocates" such as Mary Shellman.

Setting the room to 1920 will allow for dynamic interpretive opportunities, including the exploration of women's equality in the wake of the 19th Amendment's ratification, and Mary Shellman's lifelong role in politics, civics and community activism.

HOW WILL THE ROOM LOOK?

While we have no period photographs of the upper level of the house, a few rare 1907 photographs document the main floor hallway and another, c. 1920s photo shows furniture in the parlor that she was selling to an antiques dealer. Collectively, these images offer valuable insights into Mary Shellman's decorating style during the early 1900s, including:

- her interest in Americana
- her desire to use antique furniture
- the influence of Colonial Revival style
- her relatively simplistic, uncluttered style
- a preference for classical lines and symmetry
- the use of rolled window shades
- the presence of houseplants

NOTES ON PERIOD BEDROOMS

At the turn of the century, upper and middle-class Americans moved away from Victorian excess, favoring simpler decor, especially in bedrooms. Colonial Revival style, popular by the 1890s, appealed to Mary Shellman due to her historical interests. The Arts and Crafts movement also promoted simplicity, emphasizing handmade, high-quality goods. Bedroom color schemes reflected nature, with earthy tones and neutral or pastel walls complemented by traditional trim colors.



INTERPRETIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

As a historic house, the Shellman residence is best experienced as a lived-in space rather than a museum filled with signage. To maintain the authenticity and atmosphere of Mary Shellman's room, interpretive panels will be limited and primarily used for self-guided tours. **Instead, the room's furnishings, photographs, and artifacts will invite visitors to immerse themselves in the space, encouraging deep looking, curiosity, and personal exploration of Shellman's story and legacy.**

INTERPRETIVE TOOLS

01

GUIDED TOURS

The tour will use the room's furnishings, photographs, and artifacts to bring Shellman's story to life.

02

PERSONAL DEVICE INTERFACE

QR Codes allow visitors to use their personal devices to connect to expanded content. QR codes would link to videos, recorded songs, poetry, Catalog It and research articles.

03

LOW IMPACT READER RAIL

A reader rail will provide a barrier to the room once self-guided tours are instated. These can be changed easily to reflect seasonal or special content and can be moved as needed.

04

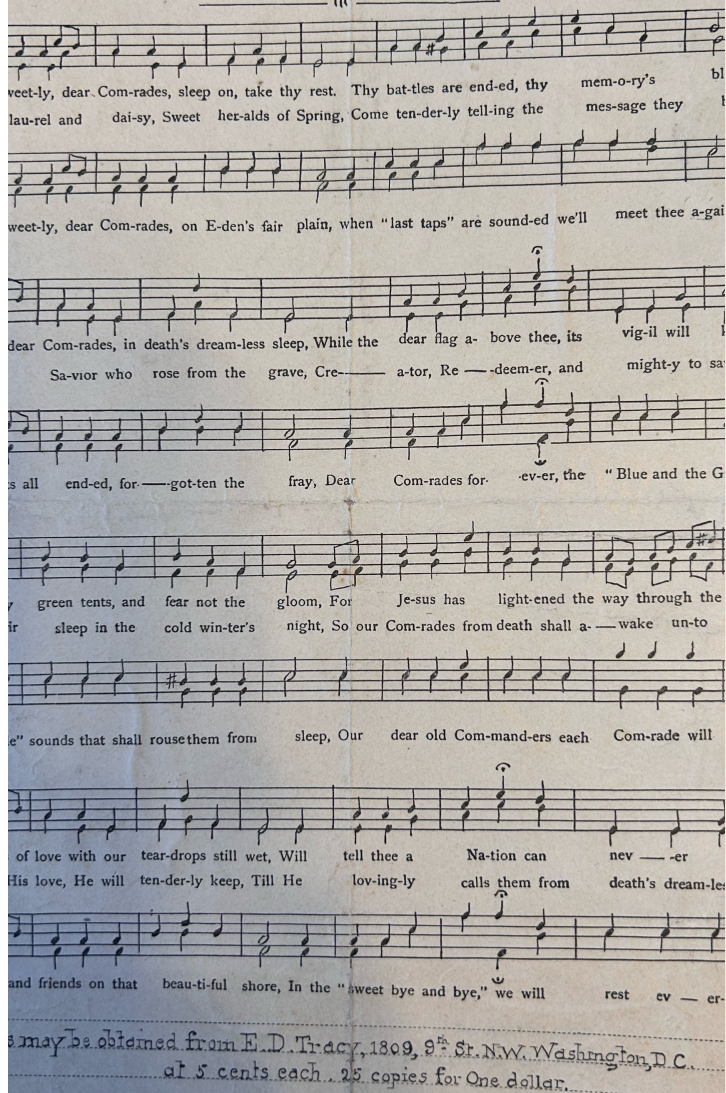
IPAD AUDIO INTERACTIVE

Visitors can interact with a screen to play Mary Shellman's poetry and songs or see items not on view. Visitors with mobility impairments will be able to see the room from downstairs.



SLEEP SWEETLY, DEAR COMRADES.

Hymn by MARY BOSTWICK SHELLMAN, and Dedicated to KIT CARSON POST, No. 2, G. A. R.,
Department of the Potomac. Music Arranged by E. S. TRACY.



INTERPRETIVE TOOLS, CONT.

GUIDED TOUR BENEFITS

A trained volunteer docent or staff member will lead an interactive discussion of the themes, leading with the visual aspects: the furnishings, the photographs, the artwork, the historical clothing, etc. to tease out the storylines and essential questions

These tours will avoid being lectures by leaning heavily into asking the audiences to look, observe and ask questions.

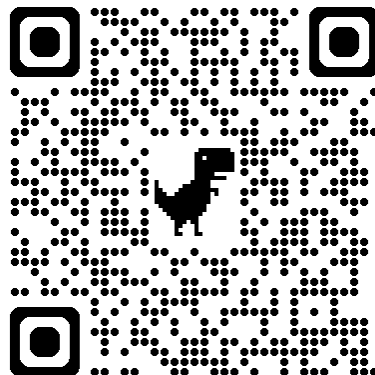
At least two tours will be created: a regular tour and a school/youth group tour. These can be customized easily to meet the needs of specific audiences.

A guided tour lowers concerns about security and theft.

Guided tours are low cost and high impact. Estimated costs: \$500 for printing materials and training time.

SAMPLE QR CODE

Try out this sample page. It links to Mary Shellman's poems. Guests can link to this content on their personal devices or via the iPad station in the Shellman House.





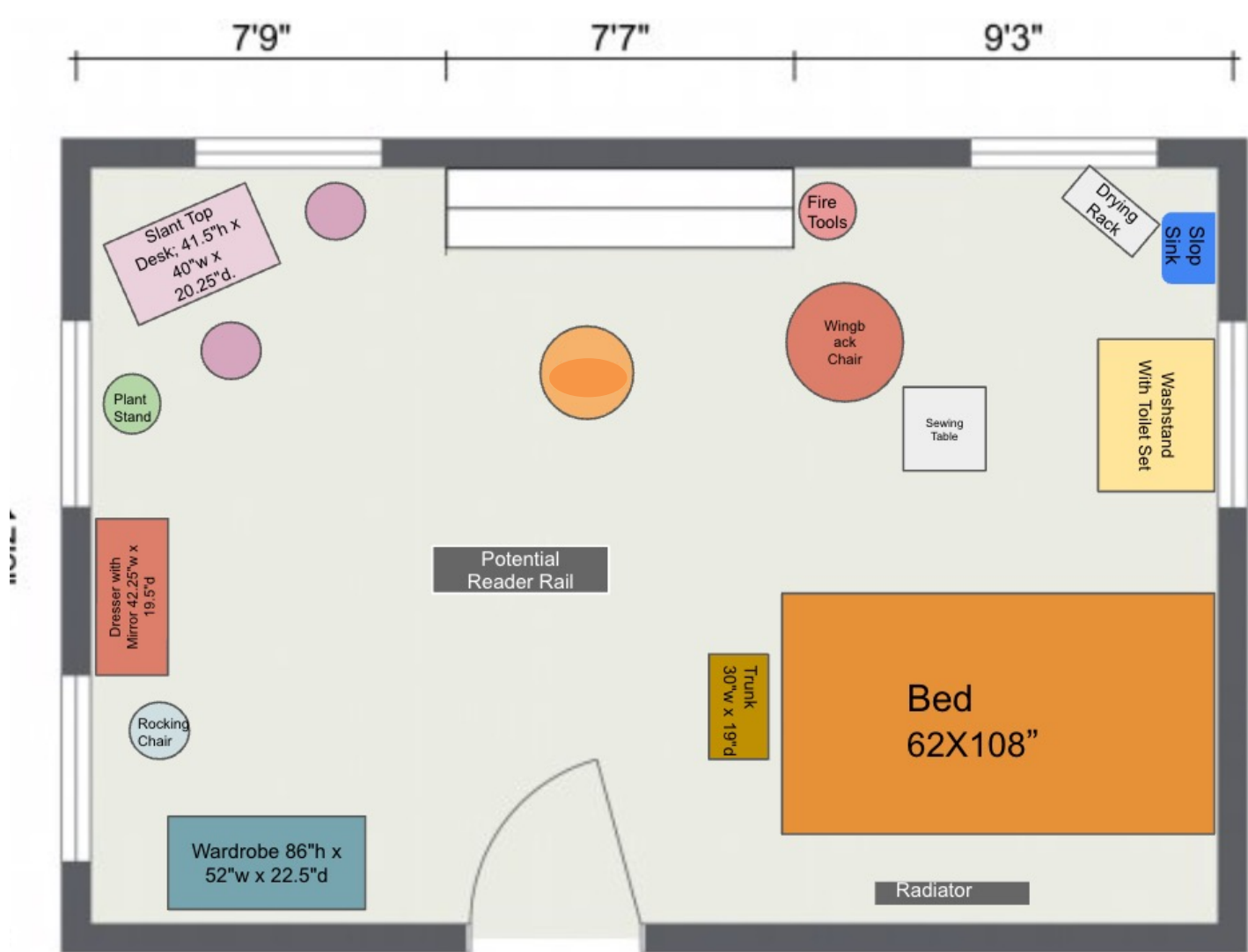
IPAD BENEFITS

- 👤 **Available to All-** School and youth groups who don't have personal devices can still experience audio-based content.
- ★ **Interactive**– An iPad allows visitors to easily browse through poems, songs, videos and artifacts, enhancing engagement with touch and audio features.
- 👤 **Accessible** – allows visitors who can't access the second-floor similar interpretive experiences
- 💰 **Costs** – Refurbished iPad: \$600, Stand \$250, Speaker: \$150- **Estimated Cost: \$1,000**

READER RAIL BENEFITS

1. **Flexible-** Can be set up for self-guided tours to provide interpretation or used during guided tours as an aide for docents.
2. **Seasonal-** Sign inserts can be changed easily to reflect seasonal or special content and can be moved as needed.
3. **Secure-** Creates a visual barrier to keep visitors away from sensitive collection items and can be combined with ropes for greater protection.
4. **Costs-** The Historical Society already owns barriers, so costs include professional graphic design and printing. **Estimated cost: \$1,000**





ROOM LAYOUT

The Shellman bedroom is approximately 17x25 feet. Entering the room, a visitor faces the fireplace surrounded by two large windows. The fireplace will be decorated with various photographs related to the three themes, and a bust of Charles Dickens known to be in the house. A cast iron slop sink and drain in the corner reflect transitional technology prior to bathrooms being widely adopted. A desk in the other corner will contain items related to Mary Shellman's work as a suffragist, writer and poet. Her dresser will also be decorated in pictures of family and friends, as was common at the time.

The walls will feature artwork created by Mary Shellman, as well as portraits of her parents and other artwork known to hang above her bed. The room will have a lived-in cozy atmosphere but also show how Mary is slowly packing up and beginning the process of leaving Westminster.



NEXT STEPS

1. Compile comments and feedback from today's stakeholder meeting.
2. Use themes and feedback to guide writing of the two guided tours and the script for the reader rail panel.
3. Contract designer and printer to produce reader rail content.
4. Purchase iPad and stand and work with website development team to create web pages for poetry, songs and videos.
5. Begin installation of window treatments, furniture and collections objects into the room.

EVALUATION

The Historical Society staff will regularly evaluate the Mary Shellman Bedroom exhibit to ensure its effectiveness and visitor engagement. Assessments will be based on:

- **Visitor Feedback** – Collected through online comments, surveys, and informal conversations
- **Staff Observations** – Monitoring visitor interactions to identify which elements draw the most interest
- **Docent & Volunteer Input** – Gathering insights on common visitor questions and engagement levels
- **Attendance Trends** – Comparing exhibit-specific visitation to overall museum traffic

Based on these evaluations, staff may adjust interpretive signage, enhance storytelling elements, or refine the layout. This ongoing assessment ensures that the exhibit remains engaging and educational

”

**Oh! The faces and voices of
those who have gone,
Who have passed to the
other shore,
I can see and hear them all
tonight,
As I never have done
before.**

Mary Bostwick Shellman



QUESTIONS?

NOTES





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