

Volunteer Training Recap

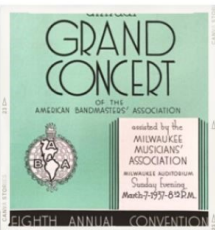
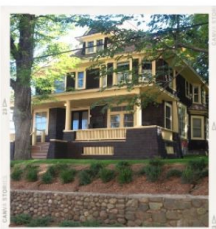
Our first foray into a formal volunteer program brings fresh enthusiasm to the Grainger historic site

Once a gracious, country neighborhood of old White Plains, Cromwell Place is now a business district, with only the Percy Grainger Home and Studio (PGH&S) as a reminder of a different time. “When I first saw this house over twenty years ago, it looked strikingly out of place with its yard, trees and massive porch,” says Susan Colson, Percy Grainger Society (PGS) board member and longtime volunteer, “Even at first glance, I was deeply curious about it and wanted to know more about its purpose and history.”

VOLUNTEER

ORIENTATION

PERCY GRAINGER HOME & STUDIO SITE



Saturday, January 21

www.percygrainger.org

It took over a year (back then, PGH&S was only open in warm months), but eventually a house tour was scheduled. “House visits were appointment-only, and persistence was necessary. It took many calls,” Susan noted, “Ella Grainger’s second husband was elderly and not always up to meeting visitors and conducting tours.” Eventually, she was escorted room-to-room, by, as luck would have it, PGS past president, Barry Ould, providing the history and commentary. She learned that Barry visited almost every summer from Scotland, and always spent the first few days of each trip

attending the house. The PGS has always had a very small group of extraordinarily dedicated volunteers and caretakers.

As the volunteers aged, PGH&S had fallen into considerable disrepair. The heat had been turned off for years and a plumbing leak had collapsed the living room ceiling. Basement contents were slowly succumbing to mold. “The situation was really tragic, the entire house had a ‘feel to it,’” Susan continued, “it was going to take considerable focus to move the house into the realm of a working, breathing historic home.” But visitors still called regularly, wanting to see rooms where Percy (and Ella) had worked and lived in days gone by.

By 2018, there were only two docents, Susan and Anne Ocone. Anne had begun working with the PGS board to organize the house and collection. While collection maintenance

took precedence, Anne was often pressed into service coordinating events and concerts. But before any event or tour could be predictably scheduled, repairs to the PGH&S were necessary. Painting and room updates began along with a new heating and air conditioning system. In the meantime, visitors continued to call, and often had to be scheduled around construction crews.

“We continued our tradition--begun by Ella Grainger herself--of individual, guided, room-by-room tours,” Susan explained, “the house is not really set up easily for groups or self-guided visits. These tours are great fun for the guide as well as the visitors, but are time consuming and there are so many competing projects for the facility and organization.” A 2021 strategic plan identified many tasks for the organization, with the house and collection as just one focus among several. The Society needed to find a way to increase visits with limited resources. Electronic bookings helped, but there was still the matter of conducting one-on-one tours. More tour guides were needed.



Volunteer trainer Susan Colson explains Grainger's circa 1930's darkroom photographic equipment to new volunteer Maci Bianco.

In the summer of 2022, PGS received a grant to support and increase community engagement. One result of this grant was the new monthly e-newsletter *Of Note*. Another focus is a volunteer training program. In January, 2023 a call went out for those interested in volunteering at the PGH&S. A volunteer training date was set and materials, a sample script as well as a slide show, were put together. Six local people signed up and more inquired about volunteer training in the future. After an initial training, engaging the volunteers become a priority.

One volunteer, Maci Bianco, decided that the PGH&S was a perfect match with her interest (and college major) in music history. “I was so happy to find your call for volunteers on the Volunteer New York! website and see that you were training tour guides to work at the Percy Grainger Home,” said Maci, “I knew right away that my interest in music and research would be a good match.” Maci, a White Plains resident and 2016 graduate of Sarah Lawrence University, completed the January 2023 training, commented, “My favorite

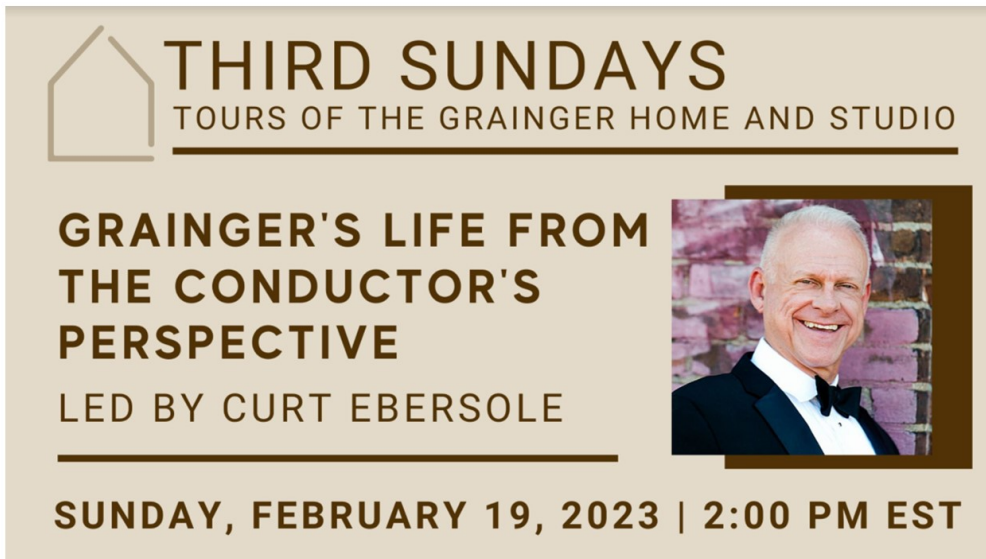
part was the house tour at the end where we were asked to enter each room and pick out three objects that we might want to learn more about.” The training was meant to be very hands-on, and participants were asked to “anchor” their future tours with a limited number of items that caught their attention. Maci chose her items, made notes, then came back on the following Wednesday to begin her own exploration and research. “I think I will write a blog post first, choosing some of the records from Grainger’s collection

to inspire my research,” she noted, “I certainly plan to come to the PGH&S on as many Wednesday’s as possible to learn and explore.” Wednesdays are a reliable time to find staff and other volunteers regularly at 7 Cromwell Place.

As Maci’s experience illustrated, volunteer training by its very nature requires a solid

introduction followed by further education and engagement. Maci has signed up for her fellow trainee’s house tour on Sunday, February 19 with Curt Ebersole doing the honors. Curt, Music Director of Westchester Symphonic Winds, has been to the PGH&S on many occasions over the years, especially to acquaint visiting conductors with the house. “I am honored to do the inaugural *Third Sundays at the Grainger House*,” Curt notes, “I look forward to exploring and discussing this particular aspect of Grainger’s life.” ‘Third Sundays’ is an effort to open the house on a regular basis to the public around a certain, specific topic We are hoping to open the house more frequently as more tour guides are trained and identify their own interests. Another trainee is exploring a house tour and talk on “Percy Grainger and Frederic Fennell” later in early summer, perhaps May or June. Additionally, our Annual Spring Open House (April 16, 2023) is on the third Sunday in April.

The Grainger Society continues to expand and explore volunteer (and virtual) opportunities. Our first actual training is in the books, we are eager to see where our new volunteers take the Grainger Legacy.



THIRD SUNDAYS
TOURS OF THE GRAINGER HOME AND STUDIO

**GRAINGER'S LIFE FROM
THE CONDUCTOR'S
PERSPECTIVE**

LED BY CURT EBERSOLE

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2023 | 2:00 PM EST

In order to serve our new volunteers and the broader community as well, the PGH&S is opening its doors on “third Sunday” of sectioned months.