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Something Old Becomes Something New

A gala next month at Terrace Hill re-creates a century-old Hubbell wedding.

By Carol McGarvey: Register Staff Writer

In case you missed the carriage to Beulah Cooper Hubbell's glorious wedding to a Swedish count in 1899, all is not lost.

The Terrace Hill Society, Hubbell descendants and Gov. Tom and first lady Christie Vilsack are hosting a re-creation of the wedding reception and lawn party as a fund-raiser for repairs for the castle-like mansion of Terrace Hill.

The 1899 wedding of Frederick M. Hubbell's daughter to Count Carl Axel Wachtmeister of Sweden was a storybook event that captured the curiosity of society-watchers around the world.

The idea for the re-creation came from George Mills of Des Moines, reporter and historian who is an honorary member of the Terrace Hill Society. In his book, "The Little Man With the Long Shadow" about Hubbell, Mills wrote, "Grand Avenue was thronged with carriages that chilly spring evening as all Des Moines struggled to catch a glimpse."

Mills says he is charmed by the fact that, since Hubbell was feuding with the Des Moines Leader newspaper at the time, he did not invite the paper to cover the wedding reception. However, reporter Oliver Newman dressed as a foreign diplomat and joined the party. His story the next day praised the lavish affair.

According to "recipes and Recollections From Terrace Hill," Newman wrote this: "Under the shimmering, many-tinted lights of the great parlor chandelier, with its thousands of cut-glass prisms, before an altar of ferns and lilies, with the melodious strains for the Lohengrin wedding march floating softly through the hallways on perfume-laden air, the happy couple spoke the vows which united ancient title and beauty, wealth and ancestral honor, the offspring of ancient nobility and the scion of modern progressiveness and enterprise."

Worn by Hayley Vaughan

As a showpiece for the 1999 gala, dressmaker Faythe Dornink of Des Moines has re-created a *peau de soie* and silk jacquard wedding dress, which will be worn by Hayley Vaughan, great-great-granddaughter of F.M. Hubbell.

Hans Wachtmeister of Virginia Beach, Va., a great-grandson of Beulah and Carl, will portray the groom.

After the gala, the dress will become a part of the permanent display at Terrace Hill.

Intricate beading on the dress of a Victorian floral design was completed by Thy Cathi, a Lao seamstress of Des Moines.

The bride will wear period Edwardian jewelry provided by Ginsberg's Jewelers and ostrich feathers in her hair.

She will carry a Victorian bouquet of white roses, stephanotis, lily of the valley, lilies and ivy.

Other Descendants

Other wedding party members also are Hubbell descendants.

Christie Vilsack is particularly excited about her first gala at Terrace Hill.

“I grew up with Early American antiques, so the whole Victorian era is new territory waiting to be explored for me,” she said. “This beautiful home is one big school. I’m enjoying learning about the era and the family who shared this mansion with all Iowans.”

Like any home, she points out, this one needs repairs. First phase restoration adds a sprinkler system and repairs to some wood and concrete portions of the home.

The second phase includes adding a garage to the property.

The third phase will address accessibility and safety issues, and the fourth, historically correct landscaping to the grounds.

Hubbell Memorabilia

“The whole Hubbell family has been most gracious in helping with this gala,” says Dottie Butts, president of the society. “They are coming for the party from all around the country and from London and have graciously shared Hubbell memorabilia to be displayed during the gala.”

Hubbell family china, crystal and linens will be used during the dinner.

Shayla From and Janie Wine are chairing the event.