

Media Contact:  
Melissa Abernathy, Communications Manager  
804-358-7166, ext. 315  
mabernathy@maymont.org

## MAYMONT TO UNVEIL NEW HISTORICAL PROGRAMS AND GUEST FACILITIES, FULFILLING A SPECIAL TWO-YEAR COMMONWEALTH GRANT

**Richmond, Virginia** – This year, Maymont is rolling out a series of immersive history programs and facility enhancements that will culminate in the opening of a new orientation center and active learning classroom this fall. The two-year project fulfills a special 2020 Commonwealth grant meant to enhance the public’s experience with Virginia’s diverse history by braiding together the stories of the African American staff who worked at Maymont during the Jim Crow era with the stories of the Gilded Age owners of the estate, James and Sallie Dooley.

Maymont’s historical curators and educators\*, working with outside experts, have been developing six new audio tours that tell a multi-dimensional story of the period between 1893 and 1925, when the Dooleys lived at Maymont. The tours incorporate the extensive research conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s with descendants of several of the African American domestic staff who worked at the estate. The narratives spotlight the contributions of the highly skilled workers in maintaining the 33-room mansion as a showplace and hospitality center while building their own lives and facing struggles in a segregated city.

“The Commonwealth’s \$1 million investment has enabled Maymont to expand and enrich guests’ experience of Richmond’s history, telling the important stories of African Americans’ lives during the Jim Crow era in early 20th century Virginia,” said Parke Richeson, Maymont Executive Director. “Braiding together the stories of those of who worked and lived at Maymont, we’re providing engaging, relevant and accessible cultural programs that tell a complete story of our shared past.”

In the fall, Maymont will open a new Orientation Center and Active Learning Classroom in the 1908 Stone Barn, designed by Richmond’s leading architects of the time, Nolan and Baskervill. The Orientation Center will display several significant objects from Maymont’s collections and a timeline that situates Maymont in its historical context. The Active Learning Classroom will enrich the experience of tens of thousands of students of all ages who come to Maymont each year with interactive displays and hands-on activities.

A centerpiece of the two-year project is the re-imagined “In Domestic Service” exhibit, which first opened with widespread acclaim in 2005 in the lower level of the Mansion. The updated exhibit and new audio tour, reopening in June, will add experiential dimensions to illustrate the working lives of the people who kept the mansion running.

Also debuting this summer is a new family-friendly audio tour designed to engage younger guests. Families will enjoy the new Hands-On-History space, opening soon on the Mansion's third floor, where guests will be encouraged to interact with period-style Gilded Age furniture and objects.

The first audio tour debuted in November 2021, with a narrated experience of Victorian Christmas in the Mansion. When the Mansion reopened in March after a brief winter hiatus, a new Maymont Mansion audio tour was introduced that weaves the stories of the domestic staff into the experience of the main and upper floors. The Mansion is open to the public on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays between 10am – 4pm, and for guided group tours on other days.

Two additional audio tours set to roll out next year will expand the historic experience to Maymont's outdoor spaces, including the buildings along the former service road of the Estate, such as the Carriage House with its collection of period carriages, as well as the Stone Barn and Garage buildings. Guests will also have an option to take an audio tour that provides background on the grounds of the 100-acre estate, including the award-winning arboretum and historic gardens.

The audio tours are professionally written and narrated, and allow guests to follow tour routes at their own pace, in any order, simply by pointing the audio device at a beacon to generate the immersive location-specific narrative. Guest engagement staff are on site to answer additional questions and provide direction. Guided group tours with historical educators are also available by advance registration.

Open daily from 10am to 7pm (10am—5pm in the winter), Maymont welcomes more than 800,000 guests per year, free of charge, with a suggested donation of \$5. Mansion tours cost \$8 per person, \$6 for children and seniors. Guided group tours are \$15 per person.

*Please note: This material was produced with assistance from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commonwealth.*

*Maymont is a well-preserved, historic 100-acre estate overlooking the James River that was given to the public by James and Sallie Dooley, who lived there from 1893 to 1925. Today, Maymont is a welcoming community gathering place, with many unique experiences for all to enjoy, including the historic Maymont Mansion, The Robins Nature Center, an arboretum, formal gardens, and habitats for native Virginia wildlife and farm animals. Consistently ranked one of Central Virginia's top attractions by travelers and locals alike, Maymont serves over 800,000 guests annually, with free admission to the grounds, plus guided and self-guided tours, seasonal events, programs and rental spaces. Since 1975, Maymont has been maintained and operated by the nonprofit Maymont Foundation, committed to creating programs and experiences that delight, educate and inspire its guests.*

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**\*Note to editors:** Photos are available upon request to [mabernathy@maymont.org](mailto:mabernathy@maymont.org).