

## Louisiana Parlor: The Butler-Greenwood Plantation Story Professional Development for Educators | June 2015



Parlor at Butler Greenwood Plantation, August 2014. Images courtesy of the New Orleans Museum of Art. Photo by Roman Alokhin.

In 2014, the New Orleans Museum of Art acquired the furnishings of the Rococo Revival parlor from the Butler-Greenwood Plantation in St. Francisville, Louisiana. This pre-Civil War parlor created by Harriet Flower Mathews is one of the South's best preserved interiors. Harriet's suite of Victorian upholstered seating furniture, étagère cabinet, silk lambrequin curtains, gilt pier mirrors, and wall-to-wall carpet survived together in remarkably original condition, complemented by Mathews family records in the Louisiana State University library. The parlor was maintained over 150 years by the descendants of Harriet Flower Mathews. The story of Mathews family and the assembling of the parlor invites inquiry into 19<sup>th</sup>-century life in Louisiana and the economic and social means necessary for acquiring and preserving such luxury items.

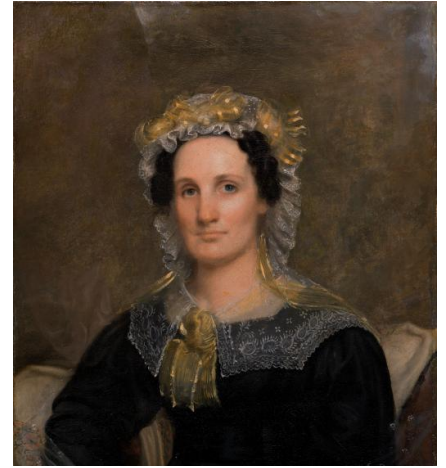
### Educator Resources

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Butler Greenwood Plantation, St. Francisville, Louisiana, August 2014. Images courtesy of the New Orleans Museum of Art. Photo by Roman Alokhin.



*Portrait of Mrs. George Mathews, née Harriet Flower, between 1825 & 182, attributed to John Wesley Jarvis, oil on canvas, The Historic New Orleans Collection, partial gift of Anne Butler, 2013.0257.2.*

## GREENWOOD PLANTATION

The Greenwood Plantation, located in West Feliciana Parish near St. Francisville, Louisiana, has been in the same family since Dr. Samuel Flower (1751 – 1813), a Quaker physician from Philadelphia, was given the land by the Spanish government in 1778. Dr. Flower and his wife, Rhode Island native Mary Carpenter Flower, had five children that lived to adulthood. Three years after the death of Dr. Flower, the title for the land passed to his eldest daughter Harriet Flower Mathews in 1816.

Harriet Flower (1794-1873) married Virginia-born George Mathews (1774-1836) in 1809. An appointee of Thomas Jefferson, Mathews was Presiding Judge of the Louisiana Supreme Court for more than 30 years. In a letter dated the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, 1817 Judge Mathews wrote to Harriet at Greenwood from Rapides Parish near Alexandria:

My dear wife, We have finished the business of the court and I am now about to go to R. Boeuf [sic]. I had not a bad journey over. Found your sister and family all well. I am becoming [ ] anxious to see you and the children, which I count on early in Oct...



*Portrait of Chief Justice George Mathews, ca. 1825, attributed to John Wesley Jarvis, oil on canvas, The Historic New Orleans Collection, partial gift of Anne Butler, 2013.0257.1.*

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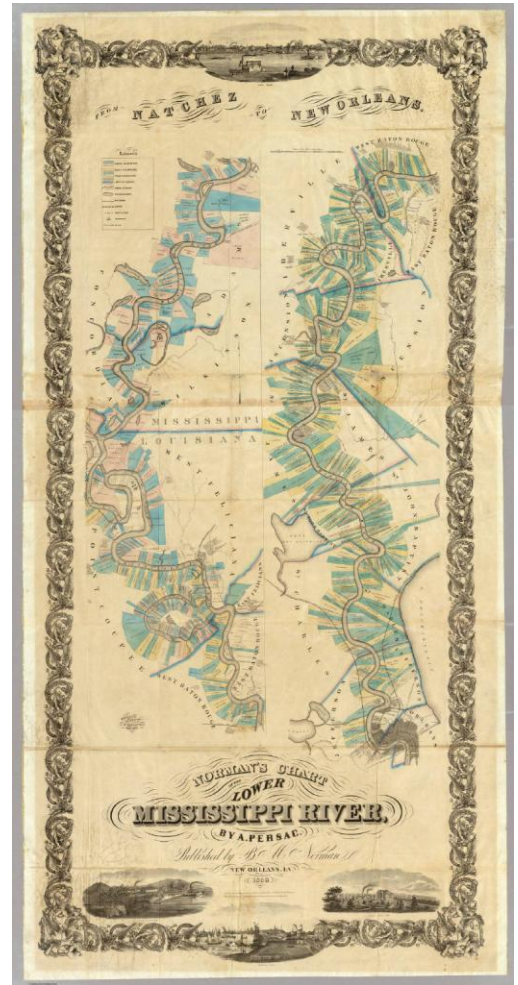
The frequent absences of her husband meant that Harriet was responsible for much of the day-to-day management of Greenwood which, using enslaved labor, produced indigo, cotton, and sugarcane. Harriet and George had one child who lived to adulthood, Charles Lewis Mathews (1824-1864). Records indicate Harriet's capable management of business affairs throughout her marriage and almost 40 years of widowhood.

### **MATHEWS FAMILY 1830-1850**

Although Judge Mathews died in 1836, the family prospered in the 1830s. The economy was booming in the South. Credit on land, slaves, and crops was easy to come by and the Mathews family purchased an additional three properties – a sugar plantation in Lafourche Parish (southwest of New Orleans) and two plantations named Coco Bend and Chaseland in Rapides Parish (west of Natchez, MS). Harriet and her son Charles Lewis Mathews (1824 – 64) managed the properties with the help of plantation overseers and a New Orleans cotton factor to advise in business affairs.

Throughout the 1840s the Mathews and their cotton factor/business manager William Flower, Harriet's brother, exercised business savvy through borrowing and mortgaging to keep all four plantations afloat. By 1850, records indicate that all debts and obligations had been repaid leaving Harriet and her family in good financial standing.

In the mid-1850s, Harriet built an addition to the original, circa 1820, cross-gabled home and began to plan the remodeling of the parlor, perhaps in anticipation of the growing family of her son. Charles married Penelope Stewart Mathews (1828-97) in 1848. The couple eventually had five children who lived at Greenwood with Harriet.



*Norman's Chart of the Lower Mississippi, by A. Persac (New Orleans, 1858). Map of the river showing arrangement of plantation properties.*

## SLAVERY AT GREENWOOD

United States Census records indicate that in 1850 there were 45 enslaved people living at Greenwood Plantation. Listed without names, they range in age from 75 year to 2 months old and are designated by an M or F for male or female and B or M for black or mulatto. Documents from the family records also attest to slave ownership including doctor bills and clothing purchases. One bill from Hebrard & Co. in New Orleans (right) itemizes 58 “linsey frocks,” dresses made of a course weave of cotton and linen, among other articles of clothing destined for the Mathews’ Lafourche plantation.

By 1860, census records reveal that 96 unnamed slaves lived in 18 dwellings at Greenwood. Ranging in age from 90 to two months, 38 were children under age 10. The Census Schedule for Free Inhabitants lists Harriet and her son Charles, his wife Penelope, and their 3 small children – Charles age 8, Harriet age 4, and Sallie age 1 by name, as well as their Austrian music teacher and Irish gardener.

The population of enslaved individuals at Greenwood increased nearly twofold between 1850 and 1860. During this same decade, Harriet Flower Mathews assembled her Rococo Revival parlor.

LOUISIANA STEAM CLOTHING MANUFACTORY.  
NEW ORLEANS, Septem 28 1860  
M. Estate of Mathews, Parish Lafourche  
Bought of **HEBRARD & CO.,**  
NO. 165 AND 167 CANAL STREET,  
BETWEEN BARONNE AND PHILIPPA STREETS.

75	Kly Deany's coats	3.50	262.50
12	" " boys	3.15	37.80
75	" " pants	2.00	150.00
13	" " " "	1.80	23.40
50	Red twilled fl'd shirts	1.20	60.00
20	" " " "	1.25	25.00
58	(Kly) linsey frocks	3.25	188.50
6	" " " "	3.00	18.00
58	" " " "	3.50	203.00
6	" " " "	3.25	19.50
110	Lowell chemises	60	66.00
120	" " " "	60	72.00
A Cases of dryage			100.00
Sept 11 1/2 for Cash			100.00
Four Cases for Lafourche.			100.00
			100.00

1860, Hebrard & Co. invoice, Mathews Family Papers, Louisiana State University, Hill Library Special Collections.

## ASSEMBLING THE PARLOR

### Carpet

Mrs. Mathews began the project of redesigning the parlor at Greenwood by adding fashionable wall-to-wall carpeting which she purchased through the local Bayou Sara retailer, I. Meyer & Hofman. The invoice, at right, indicates that Mrs. Mathews purchased 53 7/8 yards of “Velvet Carpet” on January 17, 1852 for \$120. The all-over floral patterning is similar to variations exhibited at the 1851 “Crystal Palace” Exposition in London.

The Greenwood Plantation parlor carpet crosses the room in seven strips with one center decorative panel. Until "broadloom" carpets of the 20th century, wall-to-wall carpet was created by piecing together narrow strips, commonly 27 inches wide. These strips were hand sewn together on site, and nailed to the edge of the room.

When the carpet at the Butler-Greenwood Plantation was rolled up to be taken to the New Orleans Museum of Art, it revealed “Mrs. Mathews” painted on the underside of one strip and found hand-forged iron tacks. Perhaps the tacks were forged on the plantation by slave labor.



Underside of Greenwood Parlor carpet, marked "Mrs. Mathews"[sic].

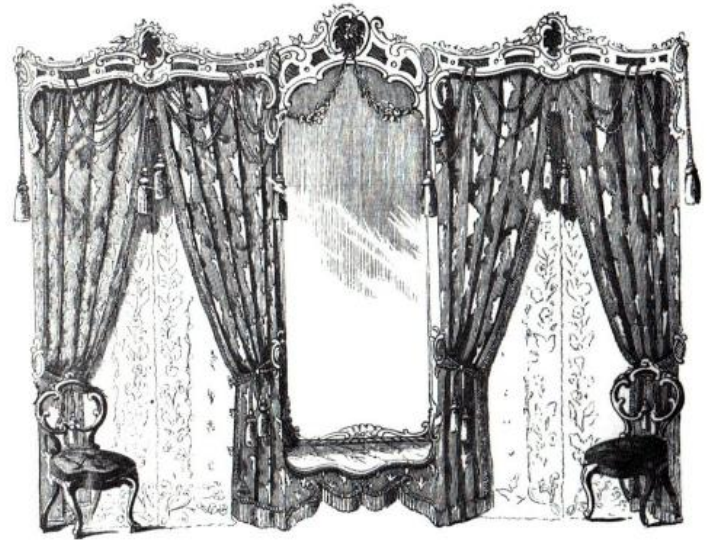
 A handwritten invoice from I. Meyer & Hofman, dated June 29, 1852. The invoice is for Mrs. C. Mathews and lists various goods purchased. The total amount is \$120.32. The invoice is from Bayou Sara, Louisiana.
 

		Bayou Sara, La.,		1852
Bought of I. MEYER & HOFMAN, DEALERS IN STAPLE AND FANCY DRY GOODS, HATS, CAPS, BOOTS, SHOES AND CLOTHING.				
Jan	1	1/2	1 lb. Muslin 30c	42
			1 lb. Muslin 27c	2 12
			1 lb. Muslin 27c	63
	17	53 7/8	Yds. Velvet Carpet @ 19c	120 32
	28	1 lb. French ribbon 19c	1 1/2	28 50
	31	1 lb. French ribbon 19c	6 1/2	123 50
		2 lb. Buttons @ 4c	1 lb. Buttons @ 7c	5 75
		2 lb. Buttons @ 4c	1 lb. Buttons @ 7c	17 25
	28	53 1/2	Yds. Ribbon @ 16c	85 19
				31 19

1852, Mrs. Mathews account with I. Meyer & Hofman. LSU Libraries.

## Pier Mirrors and Curtains

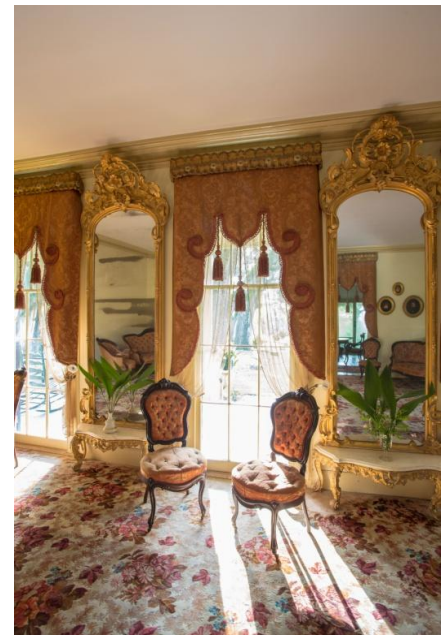
Each element of Harriet's parlor reflects the most current styles of the day. *Godey's Lady's Book*, an extremely popular magazine of the pre-war years with subscriptions to over 150,000 homes, reveals the current mode in illustrations such as the one to the right, published in 1854 and 1858. The dramatic arrangement of pier mirrors and brocade silk lambrequin curtains with cornices are in the fashionable Rococo Revival style, "a recent innovation of Parisian taste," and similar to those Harriet would choose for Greenwood.



From *Godey's Lady's Book*, (published Philadelphia, 1830-1878), used in August 1854 and August 1858.

In 1859, Harriet relied on New Orleans retailer C. Flint & Jones to order nine-foot-tall gilded pier mirrors flanked by silk lambrequin curtains. These items were likely European imports, and were expensive at \$475 (or about \$14,000 today). Cyrus Flint and J.H. Jones ran their furniture retail and wholesale business, C. Flint & Jones, on New Orleans' Royal Street from 1846 to 1866. Harriet Flower Mathews could have visited the shop in person during her many trips to New Orleans.

Each of the five window treatments in the parlor have a pair of gilt metal and white "milk glass" calla lily shaped curtain tiebacks. The calla lily is a plant that thrives in the wetlands of Louisiana. These held back a sheer lace panel that shielded the room from light. These tiebacks are stamped with the name of their manufacturer, R.W. Winfield & Co of Birmingham, England, a large producer of metal furniture such as ornate iron beds and rocking chairs.



Probably European, C. Flint & Jones, retailer (New Orleans, Louisiana, 1846-66), Five lambrequin curtains with cornices and Pier Mirrors, 1859. Museum purchase, William McDonald Boles and Eva Carol Boles Fund. Photo by Roman Alkohn.



R. W. Winfield & Co. (England, Birmingham), Calla lily curtain tie-backs, ca. 1850. Gilt brass, white glass. Museum purchase, William McDonald Boles and Eva Carol Boles Fund.



1858 advertisement in "Crescent City Business Directory."



Parlor chair from Greenwood Plantation, 1861. Hubbell & Curtis, retailer. NOMA, William McDonald Boles and Eva Carol Boles Fund. Photo by Roman Alokhin.

## Furniture

For her suite of upholstered seating furniture, Harriet chose a little-known retailer from Bridgeport, Connecticut, Hubbell & Curtis. In the *Evening Farmer* in February 1865 (above right), they advertise "furniture of every description usually kept in an establishment of this kind." In 1861 Mrs. Mathews ordered furniture for her parlor. The carved rosewood furniture is in a popular Victorian style, "Rococo Revival," and impressively retains its original silk brocade upholstery. Rococo refers to the international style of the mid-1700s, an aesthetic that featured naturalistic curves and ornament full of flowers, fruit, and shells. The style was revived during the 19th-century in England and America. Victorians used the term "Modern French" referring to its association with courtly French grandeur.

The furniture order was placed on January 25, 1861, exactly one day before Louisiana's secession from the Union. On the eve of the Civil War, the order for 6 chairs, 2 armchairs, 1 table, 1 extension table, 1 China case, linen covers, boxes and insurance totaled \$467.05, about \$13,000 in 2015.

On April 24, 1861, two weeks after the first shots of the American Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter, Hubbell & Curtis wrote to Mrs. Mathews to request payment:

We are aware that troublesome times are come to all parts of our country...Our business is nearly ruined. But if our friends who are able will pay us, we shall be able to honor all of our notes...Hoping that you will find it convenient to remit us the amt of your bill. We remain very truly your friends, Hubbell & Curtis.

By the beginning of the American Civil War, Mrs. Mathews' parlor was complete. However the life of the wealthy southern planter to which the family was accustomed was drastically disrupted. It may not have been "convenient to remit" the amount of the bill by that time.



February 29, 1865 advertisement in "The Evening Farmer"

Bridgeport, Ct., January 20<sup>th</sup> 1865  
 Mrs. Harriette Mathews

Bought of **HUBBELL & CURTIS,**  
 MANUFACTURERS OF ALL KINDS OF FURNITURE,  
 Corner Main and Beaver Streets, (up stairs,) Bridgeport, Conn.

Date	Description	Amount
1861		
Jan 25	One Rosewood Sofa	77 00
6	Do Chairs	87 00
2	Do Arm Chairs	80 00
1	Do Table	43 00
1	16 <sup>ft</sup> Wal Extension Table	48 00
1	Wal China Case	50 00
	Linen Covers for Wood seats,	23 63
	7 Boxes	14 00
	Insurance	7 42
	25 lbs Mending	2 00
Feb 12	4 Gal Cornishes & Irons	31 00
		<b>\$467 05</b>

1865 invoice for Mrs. Mathews 1861 order with Hubbell & Curtis. LSU Libraries.



## GREENWOOD PLANTATION AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Mathews family archives provide unsurprising evidence that the Civil War brought hard times to the family. Family relations wrote letters to Harriet asking for food, cash, and sugar. In late 1861, a relative wrote from Camden, Alabama requesting molasses to help feed slaves:

I have no money...and I don't know how to feed them except on molasses bread + a little Beef. Now as I have no money to buy any molasses I want you to let me have thirty or forty brls payable when the war is over...

Unrelated to the war, Harriet's son Charles died in 1864 leaving Harriet and her widowed daughter-in-law to raise five children. As the war came to an end Harriet faced the tasks of rebuilding the plantations and deciding how to employ nearly 200 former slaves.

Records indicate that at Greenwood, the issue of employment was met with contractual agreements laid out in "Rules and Regulations for the Plantation known as Greenwood." This document lists a variety of expected behaviors including where to smoke and when to sleep. Consequences for "causing trouble" or "inciting riot" included dismissal and forfeiture of pay. Greenwood freedmen leaving without permission during working hours were subject to double deduction in pay.

Another document from February 1866 (above right) indicates that payment for employment included a pair of shoes. Twenty-six freedmen signed this document by marking an "X" to show:

We the Freedmen on the above named Plantation having signed the contract of the present year do make our respective marks each opposite our names certifying that we have received according to the contract one pair shoes each.

The Mathews records give a glimpse of the ways that one family faced the economic and social changes encompassing the south after the war.

1866  
Greenwood Plantation February

We the Freedmen on the above named Plantation having signed the contract for the present year do make our respective marks each opposite our names certifying that we have received according to the contract one pair shoes each

Names	Age	for Overlaps	for
Walter X Simpson	11	for Overlaps	for
George X Guffy	11	for Overlaps	for
Madraich X Turner	8	for Overlaps	for
Robert X Turner	9		
John X Turner	7		
John X Turner	6		
Agnes X Bailey	6		
Math X Guffy	6		
John X Robinson	8		
Virginia X Simpson	7		
David X Benjamin	11		
David X Bell	11		
John X Bell	8		
William X Bell	8		
Salomon X Bell	12		
Delila X Bell	8		
Robert X Bell	11		
Marria X Bell	5		
Veple X Bell	11		
David X Turner	8		
John X Robinson	6		
John X Turner	6		
John X Williams	8		
Henry X Williams	6		

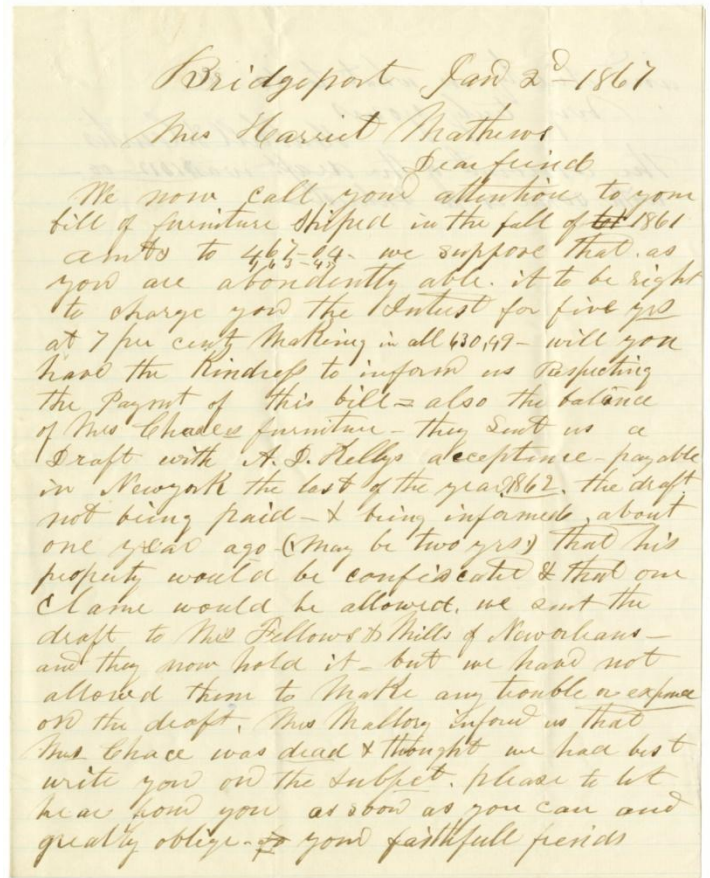
February 1866, List of Freedmen Drawing Shoes on Greenwood Plantation. LSU Libraries.

## 1867 BILL OF FURNITURE

Throughout the tumult of war and changing family circumstances, the parlor that Harriet Flower Mathews assembled survived intact. However, the bill for the furniture had apparently not been paid. In 1867, as north and south business relations resumed, Mrs. Mathews received a letter from Connecticut furniture retailer Hubbell & Curtis asking for payment plus interest.

Dear Friend, We now call your attention to your bill of furniture shipped in the fall of 1861 amts to 467-04. We suppose that as you are abundantly able it to be right to charge you the interest for five yrs at 7 per cent Making in all 630.49- will you have the Kindness to inform us respecting the payment of this bill[...] Very truly yours  
Hubbell & Curtis

The total with interest of \$630.49 would amount to about \$10,000 in 2015. Mathews family papers do not include outgoing correspondence, and therefore do not indicate whether this bill was paid. If the 1870 U.S. Census is a clue, we can surmise that Harriet may not have been "abundantly able" to pay \$630.49 in the late 1860s. Whereas her pre-Civil War estimated real estate holdings amounted to \$150,000, by 1870 they are listed as \$5,000.



Bridgeport Jan 2<sup>d</sup> 1867  
Mrs Harriet Mathews  
Dear friend  
We now call your attention to your bill of furniture shipped in the fall of 1861 amts to 467-04. We suppose that as you are abundantly able it to be right to charge you the interest for five yrs at 7 per cent Making in all 630.49- will you have the Kindness to inform us respecting the payment of this bill- also the balance of Mrs Chace furniture - they sent us a Draft with A. D. Pillsbury's acceptance - payable in New York the last of the year 1862, the draft not being paid - I being informed about one year ago (may be two yrs) that his property would be confiscated & that our Claim would be allowed, we sent the draft to Mrs Pillsbury's Mills of New Orleans - and they now hold it - but we had not allowed them to trouble or expense over the draft. This matter informed us that Mrs Chace was dead & thought we had best write you on the subject. please to let hear how you as soon as you can and greatly oblige. your faithful friends

Letter from Hubbell & Curtis to Harriet Mathews, 2 January, 1867. LSU Libraries.

## PARLOR PRESERVED

Harriet Flower Mathews died in 1873 and Greenwood, with its elegant Rococo Revival parlor, was inherited by her daughter-in-law, Penelope Mathews, and then by Harriet's granddaughter, Sallie Mathews Ventress (1859 – 1934). Ventress died without children and in 1934 left the property to her niece, Anne Lawrason Butler (1878 – 1962) who eventually turned the house over to her granddaughters, current owners, Anne L. Butler and Mary Minor Butler Hebert. The property is now called the Butler-Greenwood Plantation. Over the 165 years and six generations since Harriet installed the parlor, Mathews and Butler women took care to preserve it in its entirety.

Current co-owner, Anne L. Butler, has supported the property since 1990 by running a bed and breakfast and offering tours of the home. Anne Butler's son and his family are planning to return the property to a family home. They will be the eighth and ninth generations of the Flower Mathews Butler family to live there. The parlor elements including the wall to wall strip carpeting, pier mirrors, silk lambrequin curtains, étagère cabinet, and upholstered seating furniture has been acquired and installed at the New Orleans Museum of Art insuring that the parlor suite will remain intact, be properly maintained, and be publicly displayed.

## REFERENCES

1850 U.S. Census, County of West Feliciana, Louisiana, taken on 4 October, 1850, for Harriet Mathews.

1860 U.S. Census, St. Francisville, County of West Feliciana, Louisiana, taken on 21 June, 1860, for Harriet Mathews.

1870 U.S. Census, Ward 3, West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, taken on 23 June, 1870.

Buchanan, Mel, "Going Beyond "A satisfactory picture of a drawing-room": The Butler-Greenwood Plantation Parlor at the New Orleans Museum of Art." unpublished draft chapter for *The Period Room: Museum, Material, Experience*, 2015.

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