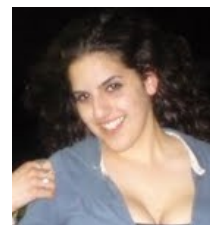


The Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum



by Sara
Zatir

Stepping back in time might seem to be the stuff of movies and lore. However, when given the opportunity to visit the [Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum](#) you will be engulfed by the history and culture of New Bedford in the 19th century. Located at 396 County Street, the Rotch-Jones-Duff House (RJDH) displays Greek Revival architecture and occupies an entire city block.

As the only whaling mansion still open to the public in New England to retain its original design, the RJDH stands as a reminder of New Bedford's rich history in trade, commerce, and culture-especially through its historical whaling industry. In 1981, the Waterfront Historic Area League (WHALE) purchased the RJDH to save it from commercial development. In 1983 the house and gardens became a museum dedicated to preservation and education of the National Historic Landmark.

The Families

Built in 1834, William Rotch, Jr. and his family were the first of the three families to live in the House. As one of New Bedford's most influential townsmen and entrepreneurs, Rotch was involved in the foundation of many establishments, including the New Bedford Institute for Saving, Friends Academy, and the New Bedford Horticultural Center. In addition, from the late 1770's and onward, the Rotch family

owned and built whaling vessels, transported whale oils and other goods, owned wharfs and storehouses in New Bedford and Nantucket, and so much more!



The second family to own the House was the Jones family. Bought in 1851 by Edward Coffin Jones, the Jones family had a fulfilling and lengthy life there. Jones moved to the RJDH with his second wife, Emma Nye

Chambers Jones, and their three daughters; a fourth daughter soon followed after moving into the mansion. Starting as a mere clerk, Jones invested in whaling vessels and eventually became an agent and owned sixteen whaling ships.

Life, however, was not always easy for the Jones family. Within a year of moving into the house both Jones' wife and oldest daughter died of scarlet fever. He continued to raise his three young daughters, and his daughter, Amelia, continued to live in the House for 85 years. Amelia Jones was also an integral part of the New Bedford community, taking part in different philanthropic charities until her death in 1935.

The last family to live in the House was the Duff family starting in 1936. Mark M. Duff bought the mansion, and also became an important part of the New Bedford community. Duff was a leading businessman owning not only his own business, but mandating many others as well. Duff and his wife redecorated the House and gardens when they purchased it, the restorations are evident in the current bathrooms and wall treatments. The Duff tenure ended in 1981, and henceforth the House was converted into the museum.

The Gardens



The gardens at the Rotch-Jones-Duff House.

Each family had their own special influence over the gardens. Even though there are no documented garden plans, the Rotch family did have ornamental gardens. Seeing as Mr. Rotch was a founding member of the Horticultural society, with the assistance of his Irish gardener William Howard, his garden consisted of fruits, vegetables, and flowers.

The current landscape is more closely aligned with the Jones' plot. With a Victorian flair, the gardens retain some of the original décor, including a pergola. Photographs from the 19th century showcase the pergola laden with vines, wisteria, varieties of roses, and many more. Also, the Duff family influence is evident throughout the garden design. The Duff family hired a Bostonian landscape architect by the name of Mrs. John Coolidge, and she revitalized the garden with ornamental beds, reflecting pools, and graceful walkways.

The gardens today are a fine mix of all three generations including different specimens from each. This award winning garden serves for many occasions including education purposes, weddings, summer concerts, etc.

Visiting the House and Other Opportunities

The Rotch Jones Duff House is open Monday-Saturday, 10:00 A.M.-4:00 P.M. and Sunday from noon-4:00 P.M. It is also open the second Thursday evening of each month free of charge.

Rates for admission and information on tours can be found on [their website](#) or by calling (508) 997-1401.

The RJDH also has many programs and events open to the public, including the Fourth Grade Woodland Garden Program, which introduces students to the nature of flowers and includes many topics on the environment, habitat, and plant life cycles; The Fifth Grade Apiary Program, which educates children on the importance of the honey bee; and the History Program for Fifth Graders that educates children on 19th century New Bedford. More information on these programs, future events, and volunteer work can be found on their website.

[Share](#)