

## BIG BOSS: THE STORY OF THE BIRCHES AND THE ROOTS, PART 2

### BY J. KENT PLANCK



#### **Hugh Heads for the Big City**

Hugh left home with \$17 in his pocket and two letters of recommendation from Professor Orton. The first letter was to Elliott Anthony, Orton's former college classmate and a partner at one of the city's leading law firms: Harvey, Anthony & Galt. Anthony gave Hugh an unpaid apprenticeship and a law book – to clerk

by day and study by night. Birch later said he mostly sat in court listening to trials. By 1871, Hugh was admitted to the bar and making six dollars a week as a junior partner.

Professor Orton's second letter of recommendation for Hugh was to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Thomas Orton. She took to mothering Hugh and inviting him to Sunday dinners where she introduced him to Rachel and Franklin Spencer, friends since school days back east in Gowanda, New York, the same town – in one of those strange "small-world" coincidences – as the first married home of Hugh's parents.

Franklin Fayette Spencer was a prosperous Chicago businessman who had married Rachel in Gowanda in 1843, and in 1855 they had come to Chicago so he could be the sales representative for the Jewett & Root stove company of Buffalo, New York, owned in part by his brother-in-law Francis H. Root. Stoves were the principal means of heating homes and businesses back then, so they were both a popular and profitable product to be manufacturing and selling.

Mrs. Orton had most likely introduced Hugh to the Spencers so that he could get to know their two eligible, twenty-something daughters: Delia, who

would later marry department-store magnate Marshall Field; and Abby, who would later marry Augustus Eddy and give birth to the woman we know today as Catherine Spencer Eddy Beveridge, the close friend of all three of Frederic Bartlett's wives.

#### **Mariah Root Steals Hugh's Heart**

But things didn't work out as Mrs. Orton might have hoped because Hugh fell in love with the Spencer girls' cousin, from Buffalo – Mariah Sophronia Root – after meeting her at one of Mrs. Orton's Sunday dinners when Mariah came to visit her Chicago cousins.

Known to the family as "Mollie," Mariah – like Hugh – was born in 1848, and she was the daughter of the stove company's Francis Root and his wife Adelia, who was Franklin Spencer's sister. Over the years, Francis made a fortune selling those stoves, and he was affiliated with a number of Buffalo financial institutions, and active with Buffalo charities.

Mariah was the third of Francis' and Adelia's four daughters. The oldest, Caroline, was born in 1839, and in 1860 married Robert Keating, a stove company employee. Caroline died in 1866, after giving birth to their son, Robert Keating, Jr., and Francis and Adelia then adopted the boy – their grandson – and renamed him "Robert Keating Root," in an effort to ensure a male heir with the Root name. Now Mariah's step-brother, though technically, her nephew, Robert became a successful businessman and managed the Root fortune after Francis died in 1892. Unfortunately, Robert died childless in 1923, and thus, with him, the plan for Root-named heirs.

Francis' and Adelia's second daughter was born in 1845 and named Mariah. She lived only five days. The Mariah who would marry Hugh Birch was born three years later, in 1848. Ten years passed until the birth of Mariah's younger sister, Ella Agnes, in 1858. Ella married Methodist Bishop John Fletcher Hurst, and had a son, Spencer Root Hurst, but Bishop Hurst died in 1903, and Ella remarried, to Theodore Byard, a noted English baritone and opera singer.

*(cont'd on page 7)*

# LETTER FROM THE CEO

BY KAREN BEARD

For most of our visitors a day at Bonnet House is like a step back in time. Marveling at the architecture, the art work and all the personal possessions of the Birch and Bartlett families is a unique experience. Visitors learn about the people who lived and worked here and can imagine what their lives were like living in this winter paradise. Most of them don't know that long before the 1920's when Bonnet House was built for Frederic and Helen Birch Bartlett, there had been many families who lived on our 35 acres.

When Evelyn Bartlett donated the property to be used as an historic estate in 1983, she left an endowment that was matched by the State of Florida. As part of the requirements of the state match, an archaeological survey had to be completed. In 1984, that survey was completed by archaeologist Bob Carr. "The survey discovered a shallow prehistoric shell midden (8Bd1102). Of particular interest was a pile of conch shells associated with the site."<sup>1</sup>

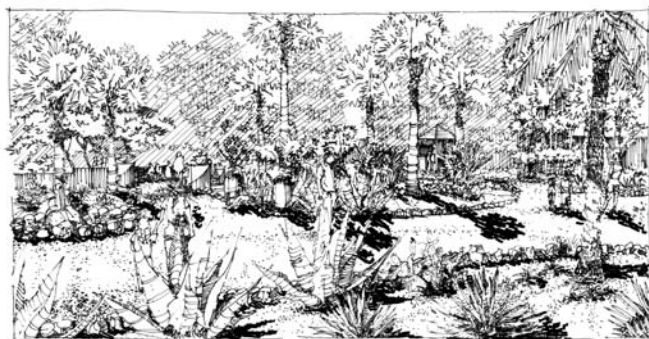
Because of the undisturbed nature of the area in which the site was discovered, the find of these intact conch shells was very rare. In most other areas rapid development of beach front property would have destroyed them. "The pile of conch shells was about one meter (four feet) in diameter and contained 27 conch shells. All of the conch shells were entire specimens. All specimens had a large hole in the body of the shell—



undoubtedly for the removal of the animal. Most of these holes were 8 to 10 centimeters in diameter."<sup>2</sup> The archaeologist determined that these holes were not typical of what one would find in a Native American midden in Florida or the Bahamas. Radiocarbon dates of the conch shells were from 1370-1540. Further, the cuts in the conch shells were made with a metal implement, not something that the Tequesta possessed. 2008 surveys of the site provided further evidence that the Bonnet House property was the site of early European contact, though probably not Spanish. The Spanish had been in the Caribbean area and had no doubt learned how to open a conch shell without using a metal implement.

The area where the conch shells were found was a fairly large Tequesta village. If you think about it, our property was the perfect place for it. The village was situated at the top of the secondary dune about 14 feet above sea level, there are fresh water sloughs, and had access to all manner of fresh and saltwater systems for travel. The lush tropical area certainly provided food in the form of fish, shellfish and no doubt had plentiful wild game.

The original entrance to Bonnet House was located near the Tequesta site. When Bonnet House was built in the 1920's the only bridge over the New River Sound (now the Intracoastal Waterway) was at Las Olas Blvd. The Main Entrance to the property was from the south near Breakers Avenue. When Sunrise Blvd. was completed in the 1940's,



the south entrance was walled off and the entrance to the property was at Birch Road off Sunrise. The beach was already being developed and the new north entrance afforded the family more privacy.

Today Bonnet House plans to reopen the original south entrance for pedestrian visitors coming to tour Bonnet House. Included in the plans is an archaeological exhibit which will describe the Tequesta Village and the artifacts and provide information about the Native Americans and what their life was like when they lived on the Bonnet House property. We hope that the south entrance will make visiting Bonnet House easier for everyone living or staying on the beach. The archaeological exhibit will add one more unique element to the visitor experience. The south gate will also allow us to be more a part of the beach community. It should be a good thing for all of us. You'll be hearing more about the south gate entrance in future newsletters and on our website [www.bonnethouse.org](http://www.bonnethouse.org).

1 Florida Anthropological Society Publications No. 12, Vol. 39, Part 1, p.164

2 Ibid, p.167

# DEVELOPMENT NEWS

## BY PATRICK SHAVLOSKE, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

### Membership Records Set in 2010-2011 Fiscal Year

Thanks to the generosity of existing and new members alike, Bonnet House raised a record \$145,240 in membership gifts in the 2010-2011 fiscal year, well surpassing the budget goal of \$139,675. At the close of the fiscal year, Bonnet House had a record 910 memberships. When couples and households are taken into account, Bonnet House has over 1,300 people involved in its membership program. Members play a very important role at Bonnet House by providing the financial basis on which our public programs are based. To everyone who joined or renewed memberships and helped us meet our goal, Bonnet House sends a renewed and very sincere thank you.

### Bonnet House Alliance Designates \$46,344 of Funds Raised for Bonnet House

Once again, Bonnet House can thank the hard working members of the Bonnet House Alliance for their fundraising activities in the 2010-2011 fiscal year. Their tireless efforts on events like Entirely Entertaining, Jazz & Chocolate, and other smaller events allowed the group to contribute \$46,343.67 for several projects at Bonnet House, including completion of the carousel animal restorations, restorations of Kampong collection animal figures, tree trimming in the Experimental Grove (that led to a bumper mango crop!), renovation of the Education, Marketing, and Events office, and general program support. A very special thanks goes as always to the members of the Alliance for their selfless dedication to Bonnet House!

### State of Florida Awards Program Support Grant

Advocacy efforts of citizens from throughout Florida yielded tangible results in the spring as Bonnet House and other cultural organizations will benefit from increased funding from the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs in the 2011-2012 fiscal year. State funding for arts and cultural programs throughout the state was practically eliminated in 2009-2010 with Bonnet House receiving no state funding that year. Things improved slightly in 2010-2011 with Bonnet House receiving a grant of \$5,648. This year, Bonnet House will receive a programming support grant of \$13,539. While this is well below the \$35,000 to \$40,000 that was typical in better economic times, Bonnet House is incredibly grateful to see state support begin to increase again. Where will Bonnet House use these funds? As was typical in years past, the funds will help support activities of Bonnet House that don't generate large amounts of revenue, but are nonetheless mission critical. In 2011-2012, state funding will help support Bonnet House's youth education programs by contributing to staffing costs for those programs as well as curatorial staffing costs.

### Orchid, Garden, and Gourmet Food Festival

What's in a name? In the case of the annual orchid sale at Bonnet House, quite a lot! 2011 will see Bonnet House's annual Orchid Fair transform into the Orchid, Garden, and Gourmet Food Festival. The name change reflects the expansion of the event to include vendors of additional plants as well as gourmet food trucks and children's activi-

ties. Paige Brody from the Bonnet House Board is chairing the efforts to expand the event while keeping it true to its reputation for selling orchids not readily available from commercial outlets. The 2011 Orchid Festival is on the first weekend of December on the 3rd and 4th. Admission remains at \$5 for Bonnet House members (general public admission will increase to \$7) with preview access for members at 9:00am on Saturday; take advantage of the early admission to guarantee your best selection!

### Bonnet House: A Legacy of Artistry and Elegance

After nearly two years, production of Kent Planck's new hardcover book *Bonnet House: A Legacy of Artistry and Elegance* is nearing completion. Coming in at just under 90 pages, the book will be offered for sale through Bonnet House's Museum Shop at a price of just \$35. The book contains over 120 illustrations, many of them new photographs taken by members of the Bonnet House Fine Artist program.

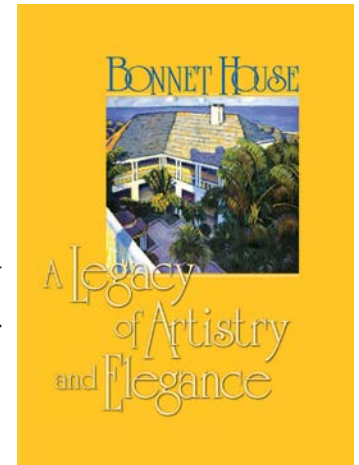
Sales will begin just in time for the holidays on November 14th with a book sale and signing party at Bonnet House at 6:00pm. Production costs for the book have been completely underwritten so sale proceeds will directly benefit Bonnet House. Watch for further information as the release date nears.

### Lois Schmatz and Kirk Imhof to Chair Impressions of Florida 2012

Bonnet House is pleased to announce that Kirk Imhof and Lois Schmatz will co-chair the opening night cocktail party that will launch Impressions of Florida 2012. The juried art exhibit has become a much-anticipated event over the past 11 years with over 40 artists participating annually. One half of all art sale proceeds from the exhibit and all sponsorship proceeds and ticket sales for the lavish opening-night cocktail party directly benefit Bonnet House.

Kirk Imhof is Group Director of Recruiting for Ryder Corporation and has been a member of the Bonnet House Board since 2010. Both Kirk and his partner, David Bolus, are personal sponsors of the event as is Ryder.

Lois Schmatz rejoined the Bonnet House Board in 2010. She and her husband John are long-time benefactors of Bonnet House. Lois was a volunteer tour guide in the museum's early days and served on the committee that presented Splendor in the Tropics, the event held on Las Olas Boulevard that was the precursor of today's Impressions. The opening cocktail party for Impressions will be on February 10, 2012, and Kirk and Lois have begun planning already. Save the date!







## THE LILY PAD

### NEWSLETTER OF THE BONNET HOUSE ALLIANCE

#### A NOTE FROM THE ALLIANCE PRESIDENT BY KEN FARLEY



When I accepted the Presidency of the Alliance at our last luncheon I thought of all the volunteers who have contributed throughout the years, both leaders and followers, with each of them having a single message echoing in their mind. It is Evelyn's closing statement on the video: "I don't want it to change". That particular sentence continues to inspire both the founding members and each new member as they join the Alliance. Remembering this seminal statement that has been the foundation of this organization, I look forward to a year of renewed energy and I am confident that we will not let Evelyn's vision for the future be compromised.

I also reflect on the organization from its inception and the original mission to support and care for this amazing property. All those who contribute help and maintain the ideas and philosophies of a by-gone era. It is refreshing to know there are people who care about maintaining a property. In this hectic world,

the experience is not only about people who want to preserve the property but each other. Volunteering here reminds me of how geese behave. As geese fly they create a V-formation. The lead goose and those directly behind create uplift for the other birds following. Flying in a V-formation permits a 71% greater flying range than if a bird flew alone. If a goose falls out of formation it feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. When the lead goose gets tired, he falls out of formation to the back and another goose takes over. The geese honk from behind to encourage those in front to maintain their speed. If a goose gets sick, two other geese get out of formation to stay with the sick bird until it gets better; then they try to rejoin the original formation. I feel we are very much like these geese. We encourage each other, help each other, and are there for each other in times of need. That is what makes it so special to be a part of this wonderful property and the people who support it.

#### BONNET HOUSE ALLIANCE CALENDAR OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2011

##### OCTOBER

- 10 Executive Committee Meeting - 10:00am  
Board of Directors' Meeting -11:00am  
Location: Leslie Well Rambin's Home, 1317 SW 17th St., Ft. Lauderdale 33315.  
For more information call (954) 563-5393 ext. 126 or email [alliance@bonnethouse.org](mailto:alliance@bonnethouse.org).
- 17 General Alliance Membership Meeting, 11:00am Luncheon  
Location: Wild East Asian Bistro, 1200 E. Las Olas Blvd., Ft. Lauderdale 33301.  
For more information call (954) 563-5393 ext. 126 or email [alliance@bonnethouse.org](mailto:alliance@bonnethouse.org).

##### NOVEMBER

- 18 Jazz & Chocolate - For more information call (954) 563-5393 ext. 126 or email [alliance@bonnethouse.org](mailto:alliance@bonnethouse.org).
- 28 Executive Committee Meeting - 10:00am  
Board of Directors' Meeting - 11:00 am  
Location: Larry Wick's Home, 4900 N. Ocean Blvd., Apt. 1105, Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, FL 33308.  
For more information call (954) 563-5393 ext. 126 or email [alliance@bonnethouse.org](mailto:alliance@bonnethouse.org).

##### DECEMBER

- 5 General Alliance Membership Meeting – 11:00am Special Holiday Gala Brunch  
Location: Hyatt Pier 66 rotating observation deck, 2301 SE 17th St., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33316.  
For more information call (954) 563-5393 ext. 126 or email [alliance@bonnethouse.org](mailto:alliance@bonnethouse.org).



## THE LILY PAD

### NEWSLETTER OF THE BONNET HOUSE ALLIANCE

#### UPDATES FROM THE BONNET HOUSE ALLIANCE

♣ Previously you read that the roof was replaced on the Island Theater through funding from the Alliance. Once again, the efforts of our Alliance members and their relationship with Royal Caribbean Cruises, has paid excellent dividends for Bonnet House. Each year Royal Caribbean puts on a "Give Day" when the company selects projects that they find in various communities and "GIVE" back at their expense. It was suggested that they look at the Bonnet House, and they did. The Theater received additional improvements when the building was completely pressure washed and sealed as one of this year's projects. Special thanks go to RCCL's Helen O'Connell for spearheading the effort and making it happen. Her visit was her first to Bonnet House and she described it as a "jewel that needs to be protected and preserved." We are already considering future projects with Royal Caribbean – so look for the updates.

♣ The Bonnet House Alliance season kicked off on September 22, 2011. Rachel Mesquita of William Sonoma and Hugh McCauley from Hugh's Catering collaborated to offer a tasting menu of recipes that are included in the Bonnet House Cookbook. Everyone attending received a copy of it as a thank you for attending. We watched, learned and enjoyed while Rachel and Hugh add a creatively refreshing approach as they updated and showed us new ways to prepare each recipe. During the demonstration preparation each dish was paired with wines from Hugh's extensive wine collection. Everyone expressed their enthusiasm with this first social and fund-raising event.



♣ Alliance membership has grown to appropriately 400 this year, so before printing our 2011-2012 Directory, the committee and other volunteers undertook the challenge of verifying information by actually contacting each member (no small task). Through the process lessons were learned--not all members want their information included in the Directory. Contacting several expired members resulted in renewals and others led to donations to Bonnet House. But most importantly, the repetitive message which echoed throughout the effort was simple: someone cared enough to reach out and make "me" feel included. We are looking at other ways to make this happen not just once a year but as an ongoing event. So I challenge each of you to reach out to someone you don't know, listen to their story, and then encourage them to participate. You will make someone feel included, but the greatest surprise may be a new friend. Remember, each of us has something to give!



#### A THANK YOU TO SANDY CASTEEL

As the new president of the Bonnet House Alliance I would like to start off with a heartfelt thank you to Sandy Casteel for her selfless and tireless contributions to the Alliance for the past two years. I think I speak for all of us when I say we appreciate her guidance through two years of challenging Alliance changes. She faced each new challenge with poise, grace and (most importantly) a positive attitude, while remaining available to anyone who needed help. She was always ready to lend a helping hand. My observations of Sandy and her mentoring led me to accept this position.

Thank you,  
Ken Farley



# BONNET HOUSE VOLUNTEERS

## BY NICHOLLE MAUDLIN

Bonnet House Museum & Gardens relies on their volunteers for daily operations, including educational programs, house tours and special events. Often, volunteers that give of themselves day after day, brightly stand out. Randy Mayweather is one of those volunteers.

Randy brings with him, a unique perspective of Fort Lauderdale. Growing up here as an African American in the 1960's, Randy remembers challenging times. He has confusing memories of his family being refused service at local shops and also recalls times when his family headed out to the beach, only being allowed to access Dania Beach out of all of the beaches in Broward County. It was not until after the Wade-In at Fort Lauderdale Beach at the young age of 13, that Randy recalls being able to ride his bicycle on Fort Lauderdale Beach and began visiting Hugh Taylor Birch State Park with his family of three brothers and five sisters. At that time, he—like so many people—knew nothing of the rich history of the Bonnet House property only yards away. It was not until adulthood, when Randy retired from the Navy as a Chief Data Processor Technician and moved back to Fort Lauderdale at the age of 44, that he was at Fort Lauderdale's Bonnet House Beach and noticed a sign on A1A that said "Old Plantation House". For Randy plantation equated to the word slaves, and he thought little of visiting the estate. Shortly after that, he saw an article in the Sun-Sentinel for volunteer opportunities at Bonnet House. His curiosity got the best of him, and he visited the property to learn about its history. He was surprised to discover that Bonnet House only employed African Americans at the estate and never housed slaves. In fact, the Bartletts considered their African American employees family and often brought them gifts from their travels abroad and showed interest in their personal lives and comfort.

His love and appreciation for Bonnet House grew, and he eventually became one of the leaders in the historic estate's education programming. Randy says he, "learned more about the history of Fort Lauderdale through volunteering at Bonnet House, than in all my years in school, including college [where he majored in business]." Now at age 54, Randy has volunteered his way through all of the positions at Bonnet House, including tour guide, nature trail guide and courtyard coordinator, before being hired on as Event and Tour Coordinator. Randy continues to share his deep historical knowledge of Fort Lauderdale to students and guests that visit the estate for educational and tour programs throughout the year. He encourages students, especially African American students, to "educate themselves to

empower everyone equally." He has learned to identify the needs of students and to bring them out of their shell by sharing his own stories in an effort to help them appreciate the rich history of Fort Lauderdale.

Linda Schaller, Bonnet House's Director of Education and Volunteer Programs says of Randy, "He is a wonderful teacher...and when he shares the history of Fort Lauderdale and talks about the animals, plants and trees...the kids love to hear his wonderful stories. Randy is truly an inspiration to the children. He knows what they like to see and tries to include all of the special things that will involve the students with art, history and nature."

Although Randy spends a great deal of time at Bonnet House Museum & Gardens, he does have other important responsibilities. Randy has two daughters, Lyndsey 24 and Khadija 16. He volunteers as a Remote Technical Technician with the DSHR (Disaster Services Human Recourses) which is a National Volunteer Agency with the Red Cross. He is also a Water Safety and CPR Instructor with the American Red Cross. As if that's not enough for this retired veteran, Randy also teaches Water Aerobics for the City of Ft. Lauderdale and swim lessons for the British Swim School, as well as maintains two of the recreation centers for the City of Fort Lauderdale's afterschool program.

Randy says that he feels most comfortable juggling his varied responsibilities, staying busy, and meeting people in different ethnic groups. He's especially at home at Bonnet House and we are lucky to have him as part of our family!!!



Irene Riley Hart with Randy Mayweather. Irene is the niece of the Bartletts' caretakers – Dewey and Arneather Hawkins.



One final note on the Roots: it's likely Mariah was distantly related to Elihu Root, born in Clinton, New York, in 1845. He was William McKinley's and Theodore Roosevelt's Secretary of War, later Roosevelt's Secretary of State, and won the 1912 Nobel Peace Prize.

### Hugh Thrives Professionally and Personally

As Hugh Birch was falling for Mariah Root, Chicago itself was falling – literally, and all around him, as the Great Fire struck in 1871. Birch played hero by getting another junior partner to help him remove the law firm's records, load them on to a passing carriage, and drag it all across a Chicago River bridge just before it collapsed. Birch's own possessions didn't fare so well; among others, he lost a collection of 2,000 insects he'd once trapped at that Antioch glen.

Hugh's biggest professional break came in 1872. Facing a tough case, Chicago's state's attorney asked Hugh's firm to write the brief. Hugh was picked to do the job and the state won.

The state's attorney also was looking for an assistant.

"I've had 100 politician chaps apply to me already," he allegedly said, "but I want the boy who wrote up the case I tried the other day."

So 24-year-old Hugh Birch signed on as Chicago's first assistant state's attorney for \$3,000 a year, a huge raise from his \$300 law-firm salary.

"I didn't faint dead away at the news," he later said, "but I did get pretty dizzy-headed. Three thousand dollars was a tremendous salary in those days."

Hugh said he "tried more cases than any boy that lived" during those years and got to know "more people in Chicago than any one individual ten times over."

In 1876, Hugh traded in his state's attorney work for private practice with a friend from his old firm. He also married Mariah Root – in Buffalo. Mariah's father bought them a large, handsome house at 1912 Michigan Avenue in Chicago's elite South Prairie Avenue neighborhood. It was previously home to Azariah Galt, a senior partner at Hugh's old law firm. Hugh would live in this house for 40 years.

Within six years, Hugh and Mariah had three children:

Monica Estevez, Marketing Manager,  
is the editor of this issue of **The Newsletter**

Carlton in 1877, Hugh Taylor Birch, Jr. – called "Hugo" – in 1878, and Helen Louise, in 1882. That same year, Carlton died from diphtheria at age 5.

### Hugh Moves into Real Estate

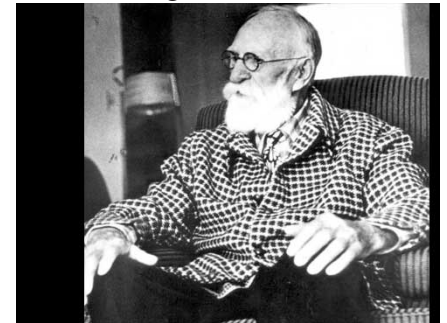
Hugh didn't spend all his Chicago days "lawyering." He also bought and sold outlying property and, in so doing, defined a lifelong interest: "improving" the land. He wanted to make money, too, of course, so he particularly sought prime beachfront real estate along Lake Michigan, as well as land along proposed highways and rail lines.

During the 1890s and into the early 1900s, Birch bought several hundred acres in north-suburban Highland Park. Purchases and sales were both in the range of one- to two-thousand dollars an acre, or about \$20-40,000 an acre in today's dollars. Birch sold his prime lakefront acreage for development into estate properties that are now worth millions. In 1916, he sold one of the larger parcels to Albert Lasker, Chicago Cubs owner and the so-called "founder of American advertising" who was CEO of Lord & Thomas, once considered America's leading advertising agency. The estate was later bought by A.G. Becker who founded a leading Chicago investment bank of the same name.

Some 154 acres in the center of Highland Park comprised Hugh's "Bob-O-Link Farm" – a good name, certainly, for the property of a bird-lover like Hugh. There, he raised sheep and dairy cattle and sold milk to local stores.

Until the teens of the 20th century, the Birches spent summers in a large house on a separate 49-acre parcel abutting the farm.

Hugh didn't confine his Chicago-area purchases to Highland Park, however. He also speculated in land further west along the route of a proposed railroad, and north in Lake Forest. Possibly in other locations, too.



Part III will be featured in the  
next issue of The Newsletter



**The Newsletter**  
OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2011

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

- ☐ \$55 Individual  
Annual admission pass for one  
10% discount in the Museum Shop and reduced fee for programs
- ☐ \$90 Couple  
Annual admission pass for two  
10% discount in the Museum Shop and reduced fee for programs
- ☐ \$125 Parrot and Family  
Annual admission pass for two adults and all children in  
household under age 18  
15% discount in the Museum Shop and reduced fee for programs

Additional membership levels available. For more information,  
please call (954) 563-5393 x140 or visit [www.bonnethouse.org](http://www.bonnethouse.org).

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