

# Step by Step

by *Janneke Fowers, Cultural Education Manager*

We don't know the exact origin of staircases, but these important architectural features go back at least to Egypt in 2000 BC. Minoan palaces in Greece had stairs as early as 1500 BC. Compared to these ancient examples, the staircase at Mayslake Hall is an infant, but because it's survived almost 100 years in near-original condition, it's an impressive regional fixture.



Mayslake Hall's Tudor revival-style architecture — a romanticized revival of the timber-frame buildings from England's Tudor period (1500 – 1559) — was popular in 1920s suburban homes. Revival styles in general appeared across the U.S. in the early 1900s after gaining momentum following 1893 Chicago World's Fair, which encouraged historical interpretations of European styles. They were used in middle-class homes, wealthy country houses, commercial buildings, skyscrapers and civic buildings and heavily influenced residential and commercial landscapes.

In an era when first impressions were important, the entrances of residences such as Mayslake Hall needed to wow visitors while affirming the social status and wealth of the owner, so architects created staircases with richly carved balusters and newel posts (two types of individual support posts). In Tudor revival homes these were modeled on Jacobean prototypes of 17th century England. Mayslake Hall's staircase with its urns and perforated strap-work design looks remarkably similar to the staircase at Aston Hall in Birmingham, England, a premiere example of Jacobean style, completed in 1635. The design evolved from wooden interpretations of pierced-stone balustrades (the line of posts along a staircase and the railing they support) in Italy and France.

Staircases also featured polished wooden stairs that were either left uncarpeted or given central runners fixed with ornamental brass or iron carpet rods. Landings had large bay windows with latticed panes and, if space allowed, vaulted ceilings to recreate a medieval atmosphere. A variety of objects hung on the walls along these impressive staircases, such as family portraits, tapestries, armor, antlers and coats of arms.

Homes such as Mayslake Hall also had vestibules, or small porches, between the front door and entrance hall. Visitors walked through the main exterior door and into the vestibule, where they then walked through a tall glass-paneled door into the entrance hall. This practical design shielded the main hall and staircase from outside draughts, a feature reinforced in winter with heavy curtains hung inside the main door on wooden or metalwork poles.



Mayslake Hall's central walnut staircase is an excellent example of the revival features above, making it the single most important architectural feature of the mansion. That's why Mayslake Peabody Estate is excited to announce it is raising funds to restore this architectural gem. The goal is to repair and refinish the woodwork on the staircase and balustrade and to install a period-appropriate runner in the summer of 2018.



## Stepping Up

The estimated cost for the project is \$43,815. Every donation can help us reach our goal.

### Cost

- \$19 One runner rod
- \$23 Strip, repair and refinish one square foot of landing
- \$187 Strip, repair and refinish one step
- \$452 Restore and refinish one linear foot of balustrade
- \$870 Runner and installation per step

Two very generous donors excited to see the restored staircase have already pledged to match the first \$10,000 raised dollar for dollar. We at Mayslake Peabody Estate hope you'll take this special opportunity to "double" your donation.

To make a donation visit [dupageforestgiving.org/mayslakestaircase](http://dupageforestgiving.org/mayslakestaircase) or call 630-206-9588.