

Report on the Spring Member Meeting April 18th to 21st, 2024 in Cape May, New Jersey

Twenty-two Rushlight members began arriving in the late afternoon and early evening on Thursday, April 18th at The Grand Hotel, the meeting headquarters for the weekend. Gathering in the hotel lobby, friends reunited and shared their recent experiences and lighting finds.

Events began on Friday morning with a viewing of the Brett and Sheryl Ewald home and collection in Villas, New Jersey. Their collection consists of a wide variety of lighting and related ephemera, ranging from whale oil lamps of the 1830s to kerosene lamps of the 1890s. There was an emphasis on signed or patented burners, chimneys, and lamps, such as Dodge fluid burning lamps and Alonzo French screw-connector lamps. There were also other accessories, such as shade holders and chimney cleaners.

After lunch, the group traveled back to Cape May to visit the Southern Mansion. The Southern Mansion is the largest and most opulent Cape May bed and breakfast. This historic mansion, built circa 1860, is set on one-and-a-half acres of award-winning gardens in Cape May's historic district. The estate has been completely restored to its original glory of genuine Southern hospitality.



Ewald Collection



Southern Mansion

Late Friday afternoon the Club board members met at the Grand Hotel while everyone else prepared for dinner in Cape May.



Gasolier in a Southern Mansion

On Saturday morning the group had the unique opportunity to experience the oldest resort city in the country on an Historic Cape May trolley tour. Cape May is nationally renowned for the many beautifully restored historic homes present throughout the city, many dating to the 1800s.

After the trolley tour, the group toured the Emlen Physick Estate Museum in Cape May for an in-depth look at the Victorian period and one Victorian family's lifestyle. Built in 1879, the 18-room mansion was built by famed American architect Frank Furness and is one of the best examples of Victorian Stick Style architecture in the country. The tour passed through the many well-appointed rooms of the house, with excellent period lighting evident in each, highlighted by a number of combination gas/electric chandeliers. The restoration of this already important museum continues within the house and extends to the grounds and outbuildings.

After a break at Lucky Bones Back Water Grille for lunch, the group visited The Antique Doorknob, an antique store in Cape May that has an extensive collection of gas and early lighting. Owner Bill Causey shared interesting stories of some of the major pieces in the store. Included were impressive stained-glass windows, fireplace mantles and an historic pianoforte.

Saturday evening the group assembled again at The Grand Hotel for dinner and entertainment. After an excellent meal, Laurie Copp lit the Rushlight, in memory of Dick O'Connell, to commence the evening events. Brett Ewald began with a very interesting and entertaining presentation titled "Following the Paper Trail: Historic Lighting Ephemera," sharing many diverse examples, from catalogs to trade cards to billheads to postcards. After Brett's presentation, the traditional show and tell session began. A variety of lighting devices and miscellanies were presented and discussed by Dale Wiltsee, Keith Letsche and Brett Ewald.

As usual, a silent auction was held during the evening. Many lighting devices, parts, books, and ephemera were offered for sale. Fred Smith brought a selection of European lighting catalogs and information for free distribution to the members present.



The Group Assembles at the Physick Estate



Aesthetic Style Gasolier in a Physick Parlor



Laurie Copp Lights the Rush

On their way home Sunday, some members visited the Museum of American Glass at WheatonArts in Millville, NJ. It is an impressive museum, housing the largest collection of American glass in the country, including examples of early lighting.

The Cape May meeting was a great success! Thanks to all who organized and participated in the meeting.

Report By: Brett Ewald

Photos By: Brett Ewald, Laurie Copp and Keith Letsche



Museum of American Glass

More Photos



Group Photo at the Southern Mansion



Southern Mansion Gardens



Cape May Trolley at the Physick Estate