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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW CASTLE, Del. – March 15, 2021 –The Delaware Historical Society is pleased to announce that the National Historic Landmark George Read II House has completed an innovative and historically sensitive mechanical upgrade to replace failing systems, improve energy efficiency, and ultimately preserve the historic house’s delicate interiors and collections. This project, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, has been in progress for more than eight years.

The multi-year plan included HVAC improvements, new control systems, upgrades to fire detection, and measures to better seal the building envelope to moisture, pests, and outside air. Together, these components will improve and stabilize the preservation environment, safeguard collections against disaster, and help the Read House to manage energy consumption more responsibly. Using up-to-date technology, the new mechanical systems will create micro-environments throughout the house that distinguish between collections needs in museum rooms and personal comfort in the visitor area, classrooms, and offices.

This important project was made possible thanks to generous funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Chichester DuPont Foundation, Crystal Trust, Welfare Foundation, and individual donors.

Located on The Strand in historic New Castle, the Read House was built between 1797 and 1804 for the son of George Read, Sr., a signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. The outstanding Federal-era architecture and interiors, the grounds, and gardens, and extensive archives that document the building and the three families who occupied the residence, make the site invaluable for the study of early American history and culture. Since the Delaware Historical Society opened the Read House & Gardens in 1976, students, scholars, and visitors from around the world have visited and conducted research.

Executive Director, Dr. David W. Young said, “We are very proud of the local and national support this critical preservation project has received, from Laird family descendants and regional foundations to the National Endowment for the Humanities. The team assembled to complete the project worked closely with Read House and Delaware Historical Society staff and volunteers who share our commitment to bring state-of-the-art environmental systems to protect the architecture and collections of this National Historic Landmark.”

Martha Moffat, Director of Buildings and Grounds added, “There’s been a big change at the Read House, and even minor change does not come easily to a National Historic Landmark. After eight years of thoughtful planning followed by six months of Covid-19 safe construction due to the pandemic, a new energy efficient climate control system has been ever so carefully inserted into the building. A large and talented team made a concerted effort to meet the challenge of installing a new HVAC system while adhering to the highest standards of historic preservation. I congratulate and send my hearty thanks to

our general contractor; the mechanical, electrical, and structural engineers; fine arts handlers; conservators; architects; carpenters; plasterers; painters; electricians; mechanical installers; plus staff and volunteers.”

The Read House is especially significant in understanding the evolution of American architecture during the early years of the nation. The construction of the house is documented in more than 130 letters, drawings, and invoices housed at the Delaware Historical Society’s research library along with related materials dating from the founding fathers to the present day. More than 1,700 collection items are currently on exhibit in the house.

“This project has been eight years in the making and is better for all of the expert problem-solving that has come together during that time. Philip and Lydia Laird, the last private owners of the Read House, took even longer to settle on the Delaware Historical Society as its long-term steward, a responsibility we take very seriously. This project will not only ensure the most comprehensive climate control the house and its contents have ever enjoyed—it will also set the stage for a program of high-caliber exhibitions, collaborations, and collection development that better our community in Delaware and beyond.” remarked Brenton Grom, Director of the Read House & Garden.

Project planning volunteer Jerry Bilton added, “This has been one of the best experiences of my life. . . I have had such a positive experience with the Delaware Historical Society and am grateful to know that it is in excellent professional hands.”

Students, neighbors, scholars, and tourists of all ages gain new perspectives on history, nature, and the role of Delaware in the life of the nation at the Read House. Guests marvel at the plasterwork and the ornamental woodwork—the largest known concentration of punch-and-gouge carving, a style developed by American carpenters to emulate high-style British neoclassicism. Furnishings, prints and paintings, books, textiles, and hand-painted wallpaper all give voice to a site interpretation that spans more than 200 years. The Read House collections provide opportunities for interpretive tours, wide-ranging research in the humanities and STEM fields, undergraduate and post-graduate training, and educational programming in which students participate in onsite object- and inquiry-based learning.

About the Delaware Historical Society

The Delaware Historical Society owns and operates the Delaware History Museum; the Jane and Littleton Mitchell Center for African American Heritage; a nationally recognized Research Library; Old Town Hall; Willingtown Square, four 18th-century houses surrounding a picturesque urban courtyard located in downtown Wilmington; and the Read House & Gardens, a National Historic Landmark.

For more information, call (302) 655-7161, email deinfo@dehistory.org or visit www.dehistory.org.

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