



# Daneway House

Circa 1775  
History Gallery

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Our Museum's History Gallery is filled with artifacts that seem to breathe; their wooden frames and faded paper skins are saturated with untold memories of touch, sounds, and smells. These small houses and miniature rooms are repositories of the past, acting as three-dimensional studies of cultural trends and human ingenuity. Many of the pieces have rich and colorful backstories. For others, their provenance remains largely silent, slowly revealing their chronicles to historians through patient victories. The *Daneway House* (ca. 1775) has divulged some of the most curious stories, thanks largely to the investigative work of Museum conservationist, Casey Rice.

The *Daneway House* is a George III style Baby House built in England, circa 1775. It was acquired by Museum Founder Pat Arnell in 1988, and restored by Casey Rice that same year. The term "Baby House" refers to a common practice of the wealthy of 17th and 18th century Europe to collect miniatures and display them as a novel curiosity; therefore, Baby Houses resemble stylized cabinets rather than small houses, and are intended to merely show off a collection of miniature pieces rather than be an object of play. At well over 200 years old (older than the United States, itself), the *Daneway House* has unsurprisingly had multiple owners. Consequently, the piece was altered and in some cases damaged due to the careless actions of these alleged caretakers. For example, the original façade of the *Daneway House* was lost at some time during its long history. Rice designed a replacement façade based on historical research into the period architecture, which replicates the front wall of the home. This façade would have been attached with hinges to both sides of the cabinet front, opening as two doors that join in the center. For our exhibit purposes the museum keeps the façade on display in a glass cabinet on the wall to the right of the piece.

The missing façade was only the beginning. Rice's most grueling task was reportedly restoring the lustrous mahogany varnish, which was smothered under eight coats of dreadful paint – including horrid yellow and



(Detail) *Daneway House*, ca. 1775. History Gallery. Photograph by Balfour Walker.

bubblegum pink. Rice had to endure countless hours of noxious fumes and tiresome scrubbing as the paint slowly released its gaudy grip. Why were there so many coats of paint? The answer is not terribly surprising. "The nanny apparently used to tell the children to 'Go paint the doll's house,'" laughs Arnell. "It was a means to keep the children occupied." We rarely think of our children's playthings as being potentially celebrated museum artifacts, undoubtedly to the detriment of future conservationists. However, not all of the damage can be blamed on children. There were large, circular holes cut into the side of the house, as well. A well-meaning adult thought this was an acceptable solution for providing interior lights, cramming large bulbs into these garish gouges. Rice cut pieces of wood to fill the cavities. Other little tacky touches were slightly easier to forgive and amend, such as glued-on seashell sconces.

Now restored to its once former glory, the *Daneway House* is an object of unassuming beauty. The top of the cabinet is styled to resemble a roof, including gables,

decorative finials, two chimneys, and a balustrade. At the very top is a small cupola. The cabinet itself has only two shelves, with the bottom shelf divided by a narrow wall; this creates three rooms in total, one long room on the top shelf and two smaller rooms on the bottom shelf. ♦ The upper room is a Great Hall, the lower left room is a parlor, and the lower right room is a kitchen. The entire cabinet sits on a low matching table with four legs.

This simplistic floorplan is also quite bare, with only minimal accessories, all of which were included with the house upon its acquisition. There are nine wire armature dolls which have carved wooden heads and painted faces, including a cook, a quartet, and a serving boy, all dressed in 18th century costumes. There is also a wire armature poodle, posed as though dancing to the quartet's performance. Other objects of note include the remnants of an imitation clockwork jack in the kitchen, a complete set of leather-bound miniature copies of Shakespeare's works, and a statue of Cupid standing on a shell, a symbol of his mother, Venus.

The *Daneway House* is a marvel of the Georgian era, bridging a divide of over two centuries. At long last, a piece that survived the storms of passing generations has come to rest once more in the spotlight of a captivated audience. Alongside her venerable comrades in our History Gallery, the *Daneway House* serves as a happy affirmation of our Museum's name: allowing visitors an opportunity to travel through time through the art of miniatures.

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The Mini Time Machine Museum

♦ At one time the *Daneway House* had another dividing wall on the bottom shelf, which would have created a staircase or hallway. This architectural detail was lost at some point in its long history.



*Daneway House*, ca. 1775. History Gallery. The image below shows the attached façade designed by conservationist, Casey Rice. The façade is displayed separately in a case to the right of the *Daneway House*. Photographs by Balfour Walker.