

Meet the Staff Post-Visit Resource

Household & Estate Staff at Stan Hywet Hall

The Seiberling family lived at Stan Hywet from 1915 until 1955. During that time the domestic (indoor or household) staff and estate (outdoor) staff at this country house would have numbered between 16 and 32 people.

Some staff lived at Stan Hywet while others were day help and commuted to work from their own homes or apartments. The Head Gardner lived in the Gate Lodge with his family; female house staff lived on the second floor of the house, male staff on the third floor, the chauffeur and his family often shared living space with a chauffeur and groom in apartments on the second floor of the Carriage House. Living quarters were also located on the second floor of the conservatory's attached Service Building and the poultry man lived in a house next to the chicken houses to the west of the main house.

At Stan Hywet, household staff members (also called "domestics") maintained a very strict ranking system. Their system was even more ridged than their wealthy employers! The household staff knew their place, carefully maintained their social differences and kept check on those who stepped out of line.

Among female staff members, the top position was the housekeeper, followed by the cook. In a small house, if there was no housekeeper, the cook was in the top position. This ranking of female employees had much to do with their backgrounds, education, and how close they were with their employers.



FEMALE HOUSEHOLD STAFF ("DOMESTICS")

Rank (from highest to lowest) of female household staff in private homes:

1. Housekeeper
2. Ladies Maid
3. Cook
4. Nursemaid
5. Housemaid (Parlor and/or Chamber)
6. Kitchen Maid
7. Laundress
8. Scullery Maid

1. HOUSEKEEPER

The Housekeeper was in charge of the overall management of the house and was referred to as "Mrs." whether she was married or not. She was the immediate representative of the mistress of the house and supervised the other household staff. She was in charge of hiring, firing and punishing female staff. Her symbol of authority was a massive collection of keys which provided access to all areas of the house and its contents. At Stan Hywet, the housekeeper had an office and the largest bedroom (complete with fireplace) in the female servants' wing. The housekeeper had complete control over the household supplies and was allowed to

purchase fresh materials as needed, including general groceries, soap, candles, envelopes, etc. She also supervised the canning and storage of fruit (like jams and jellies) as well as all of the household linens (bedding, tablecloths and towels) and china (plates, bowls, cups, etc.).



The housekeeper, with the mistress of the house's help, was in charge of assigning rooms to guests. She also made sure guest rooms were tidy and had clean bedding and towels, reading material,

stationery, etc. Occasionally, the housekeeper was required to plan parties for staff and their families. Due to a high level of responsibility required to do this job successfully, employers looked for steady, honest, stable, middle-age women with a lot of experience. Housekeepers were also expected to display excellent behavior to set the tone for the entire household.

2. LADIES MAID

Ladies Maids were typically found only in the households of the very rich. Their primary responsibility was to help with the mistress of the house's personal needs: helping her change into several different outfits throughout the day; maintaining her clothing and jewelry; washing, repairing and altering her clothing and hats; ironing her delicate items; frequently styling her hair; and packing her bags and trunks for travel. Because of this special relationship with the mistress of the house, the ladies maid was often regarded with suspicion and envy by her fellow-staff members.



Typically, a ladies maid had a better education than the other female staff members. She was trained in dressmaking, hat-making (or millinery) and sewing. While most of her co-workers were from lower class backgrounds, most young ladies that became ladies maids were middle class. They also tended to dress better by wearing their mistress's hand-me-down dresses. Ladies maids were expected to be young, pleasant, neat, handy with a needle, honest (owing to their access to the wife's jewelry and fine attire) and to be above the urge to gossip.

3. COOK

The skills and demands of a household cook varied widely. A “**plain cook**” did all of the prepping, cooking and cleaning, while a “**head cook**,” like the one at Stan Hywet, had plenty of help from several kitchen maids and scullery maids. A talented and happy cook was extremely valuable to a well-run household.



The cook prepared all meals for the family and household guests. Daily baking and basic cooking was performed in the morning. Afternoons were set aside for preparing dinner party feasts. As a bonus, cooks were allowed to eat leftovers and were given the opportunity to take home broken or torn items from the kitchen or dining room.

Some wealthy people hired male **chefs** who had special training at culinary arts schools. Sometimes a chef might be brought in to teach the cook of the house a particular recipe or train them in special cooking skills.

4. NURSEMAID

In many wealthy households, a nursemaid cared for the employer's children. Nursemaids dressed and undressed the children, played with them, and took them on daily walks. Nursemaids often fed the children in their care special foods. Because they could be very protective of the children in their care and could also be extremely bossy at times, fellow staff members and even members of the family did not usually get along with them very well.



Nursemaids would give the children instructions that they were expected to obey. When they did not follow the rules, the nursemaid would often punish them. Even though they could be strict at times, nursemaids were loved by the children they looked after- especially in large households where parents did not spend much time with their kids. Because of this, the nursemaid became a very close friend with whom the children would share their fears, troubles, joys and concerns.

5. HOUSEMAID

Housemaids made certain that the house was clean and orderly. In the mornings the front entry hall and main rooms were swept and dusted. Bedrooms were freshened and beds remade including fluffing pillows, smoothing sheets, and turning mattresses if necessary. Once a week bedrooms were carefully cleaned: mattresses were brushed and swept; sheets were changed; curtains were shaken to "dust"; mirrors were polished; and a general inspection for pests (like bedbugs and lice) was performed. In the evenings, housemaids prepared bedrooms by turning down the bed covers and closing the window shades.



Throughout the day, housemaids would check and supply all bedrooms and bathrooms with soap, clean towels, writing paper and other necessary things. Additionally, housemaids cleaned the family's birdcages and often arranged fresh flowers for the family rooms. Housemaids also cleaned the rooms and made the beds of the staff members who were above them in rank.

At Stan Hywet, the responsibilities of the housemaids were divided and titles were created to reflect these areas of responsibility. The Seiberlings employed a "**parlor**" or **downstairs maid** whose job it was to clean and dust of the first floor. They would also be expected to serve the family

in the dining room if there were no waitresses available or more help was needed. They also assisted the cook by preparing food for cooking when needed. They would also carry out many of the butler's duties when he had the day off.

The "**chamber**" or **upstairs maids** were responsible for cleaning and dusting the second and third floors of the house where all of the bedrooms (or chambers) were located.



6. KITCHEN MAID

Kitchen maids were referred to as "tweenies" or "between maids." Frequently, they served in the kitchen and often assisted the house maids with their duties.

A kitchen maid's main job was to assist the cook by pounding, slicing, dicing and chopping the food to prepare it for cooking. They also lit the stove fires in the morning and polished the copper pots, pans, and spoons. They also cooked for the household staff (household cooks usually only cooked for their employers and their employers' guests.) Kitchen maids gained valuable skills and knowledge like learning to make special sauces and fancy deserts, so that perhaps one day they might work their way up to becoming a head cook.



8. LAUNDRESS

The laundress came to work every day to do all of the household laundry and to hand-clean many of the family's delicate items that could not be put into a machine.

Laundry included family clothing, tablecloths, bed sheets and bath towels, as well as the laundry of household guests. Typically, the work week was divided into organized daily tasks: two days were devoted to washing; one day of mangling (pressing or flattening of large bed sheets with a machine called a mangle); and the remaining days were used for starching and ironing clothes (ironing was the least pleasant of all laundry tasks because it was hot, it was hard work and it was extremely boring). Laundry was dried in drying closets or hung outside on clotheslines in a drying yard when the weather was nice (both of these methods were used at Stan Hywet). During particularly busy times, other household staff like housemaids helped the laundress with her work load.

By 1900, fewer and fewer live-in laundresses were hired by wealthy home owners. It was cheaper to either hire someone to come in to do the laundry or to send it out for cleaning. Still, many wealthy families in the 20th Century maintained the old tradition of live-in laundresses as long as they could afford it.



7. SCULLERY MAID

Scullery maids held the lowest rank on the female household staff. They were typically very young girls from working class backgrounds who did the dirty work: cleaning dishes from staff meals, scrubbing kitchen work tables and utensils, cleaning ashes out of stoves, and sweeping and cleaning the kitchen to ensure that it was prepared for daily cooking. Scullery maids kept long days. They got up before the cook and went to bed well after all of the other staff members.



MALE HOUSEHOLD STAFF (“DOMESTICS”)

Female housemaids began to outnumber male domestic staffs in the country houses or mansions of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Before this time, men held most of the household cleaning,



cooking and serving jobs. **Butlers** and **valets** (a man's personal servant) had a special working relationship with the master of the household. This relationship was similar to ladies maids with the mistress of the house.

Younger boys lit fires, cleaned fireplace grates, filled scuttles, cleaned and maintained the master's shoes and boots, ran errands, and frequently served as kitchen help.

By 1850, the number of male servants in Britain was decreasing and by 1881 female domestics outnumbered male domestics by 22:1, which means there were 22 female servants for every 1 male servant. While there still were more women than men in domestic service in the United States, it was considered a sign of great wealth and power to hire men.

By the early twentieth century, male positions found in the house decreased in number while outdoor positions for men increased in number.

1. BUTLER

The highest ranking position of the male domestic staff was the butler. This position demanded respect and carried out his duties with a “bossy” attitude, towards domestics in lower positions within the house. The butler and the housekeeper worked together to oversee the staff and to manage household needs.



The butler had various duties throughout the house. A butler greeted house guests, received and delivered messages and answered telephone calls (before personal cell phones). He also escorted guests to their rooms and handed out and collected mail. When people needed transportation he, called cars for them and could even request horses for leisurely riding trips.

The butler was also responsible for the security of the house, its people and possessions. His responsibility was to close and lock doors and windows at night and also to watch over the family's move to far away winter and summer homes. He'd also help pack, transport and receive valuable items that belonged to the family.

In the morning the butler cleaned and polished silverware required for the daily meals. He was also often in charge of cleaning the family's sporting equipment. Before a meal the butler set the table, announced meals when meals were ready, then supervised the meal to make sure everything went smoothly. If needed, the butler might also wait tables and assist in the actual serving of the meal. Because he was a trusted senior servant, the butler was given keys to the mansion's wine cellar. He was responsible for pouring and serving wine at the table and was also responsible for making sure any remaining wine would be put back where it belonged after the meal.

Finally, if the master of the house did not have a personal valet, the butler gave him personal assistance. Similar to the duties of the ladies maid, the butler laid out his master's daily outfit, brushed clothes free of lint and dust, polished his shoes and accessories, and made sure that all of his clothes were cleaned, ironed, orderly, maintained and available.

2. HOUSEMAN

The houseman at Stan Hywet functioned much like a master janitor. Considering the size and height of many of the manor house's rooms, the need to hire someone to help the female housemaids seemed like a good idea. The Houseman was responsible for all heavy and high cleaning in the house, including vacuuming the rugs, washing all stone and wood floors once a week, and polishing brass items. He also was responsible for cleaning and polishing the

large amount of woodwork throughout the house. He also maintained and cleaned the chandeliers, and constantly replaced the large number of light bulbs on a day-to-day basis. In addition to taking care of the mechanical operations of the house, during the winter the houseman was responsible for cleaning out and starting fires in the fireplaces. He also supplied and tended to the large furnaces in the basement. When the family left to stay at their summer and winter homes, the houseman planned and carried out the annual house cleaning projects with assistance of the other house staff.



MALE ESTATE (GROUNDS) STAFF

HEAD GARDENER

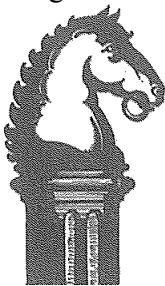
The Head Gardener was important to the successful operation and maintenance of large estates. The head gardener was responsible for the estate's conservatory or "hot house" which (before the invention of the refrigerator) produced out-of-season fruit (like oranges and lemons) for the table and flowers for the house. The Head Gardener typically hired a full time **foreman** or assistant whose duties were concentrated in these structures.

The Head Gardener planned and supervised vegetable and cutting gardens as well as the estate's fruit orchards. Pleasure gardens and large lawns required constant maintenance and the Head Gardener oversaw a crew of regular **garden staff** and **seasonal help**. Lawn mowing occupied large amounts of time and physical labor. Prior to fuel-powered machinery, lawn mowing was accomplished by hitching draft horses to mowers which were hand-walked by garden staff.



GROOM

The groom's duties included feeding, exercising and grooming (cleaning, clipping, bathing and brushing) an employer's horses as well as cleaning (mucking-out) and maintaining their stables. The Seiberlings hired a full-time groom who lived in an apartment above the stables of the Carriage House. He took care of the family's horses that were used for riding on the bridle trails that crisscrossed the property. Many of these trails were located in what would eventually become Sand Run Metropolitan Park. A groom was expected to be 'on call' at specified hours in case any member of the employer's family wished to ride.



The groom was also responsible for taking care of the family's draft horses which were used for hauling things like the large mowers that were used to mow the vast areas of grass throughout the property.

CHAUFFEUR

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, only the very rich could afford automobiles so rather than driving themselves, they would hire chauffeurs (pronounced *show-firs*) to drive for them. At that time many vehicles tended to not be as reliable as they are today so, in addition to providing basic maintenance, washing and cleaning of the family's vehicles, the chauffeur also had to be a skilled mechanic.



Stan Hywet's garage was designed to hold up to ten automobiles. It also contained a mechanic's pit, a drive through car wash, and a 500 gallon gasoline supply tank. The chauffeur lived in an apartment above the garage in the Carriage House.