

The General's Gazette

Volume III Issue I

Winter 2010

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Herkimer Home for the Holidays

On Saturday, December 5, from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Herkimer Home held its inaugural event *A Christmas Open House at Herkimer Home*. Hosted by the Friends of Herkimer Home, dozens of people celebrated the Christmas season by viewing the decorations on display throughout the mansion, listening to Christmas music, enjoying a variety of homemade desserts, and conversing with interpreters dressed in 18th century clothing.



Photo left:
Tom Kernan &
Steve Jasewicz.



Photo right:
Grand stair case.
Photos by
Mildred S.
Wheeler

Those who attended praised the event and look forward to ushering in the Christmas season at next year's 2nd annual Christmas open house. Herkimer Home thanks the many volunteers who spent time decorating the mansion, making refreshments and staffing the home that day.



Interested in becoming a Friend of Herkimer Home

- Individual \$15
- Family (2 adults & children under 18) \$25
- Seniors (Age 60+) \$10
- Sustaining \$50
- Contributing \$100
- Patron \$250
- Lifetime \$500

Come appreciate the past while enjoying one of the Mohawk Valley's historic treasures!

Christmas Tea

The Friends of Herkimer Home hosted their fourth tea of the year on December 1, on the first and second floor hallways of Herkimer Home. Over 40 guests attended including members of the Mohawk Valley Belles Red Hat Chapter. The guests enjoyed a five course meal of scones, sandwiches, soup, cranberry salad and dessert all served by volunteers dressed in 18th century clothing. Guests also enjoyed listening to music performed by Bob Schmelcher on the echo harp and viewing the many Christmas decorations placed throughout the home. Thank you to the many volunteers who made all four afternoon teas a huge success.



More Colonial Sayings of Today

Chew the Fat

A host would offer his guest a piece of bacon, which was stored above the fireplace in the parlor, so they could chew the fat during their visit.

Don't Throw the Baby Out With the Bath Water

When spring arrived, it was time to shed your layers of clothing and take the annual spring bath. A large tub was filled with hot water and first the men took their baths, followed by the women, followed by the children, followed by the baby. By the time everyone had taken their baths, the water was so murky it led to the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Getting the Cold Shoulder

When house guests would over stay their welcome, the host would give their too-long staying guests the worst part of the animal, not warmed, signaling it was time to leave.

Bombed

A bombard is a leather jug which holds one gallon. To drink a full bombard of ale would make one drunk or *bombed*.

Not Playing With a Full Deck

In the 18th century, card players had to pay a special tax for the ace of spades to obtain a full deck of cards. It was said one would be crazy to try to play a game without a full deck

Volunteer Pot Luck Dinner

On Wednesday evening, October 28, Herkimer Home hosted its annual volunteer pot luck dinner in the visitor center loft to thank our many volunteers for helping make 2009 another very successful year. Twenty-eight people attended the dinner featuring a wide variety of homemade dishes and desserts to share. If you have attended any of our special events in the past, you know it takes many volunteers to make the events successful. Because everyone is so busy during these events, we often don't have much time to talk and get to know everyone. Therefore, the annual pot luck dinner is a wonderful opportunity for volunteers to gather, relax, enjoy good food and company, and celebrate another successful season at Herkimer Home.

Herkimer Home Volunteer Meeting

Please join us at our volunteer meeting on Wednesday, March 10th in the Visitor Center A/V room. During the meeting we will be discussing Sugaring Off; our 2010 calendar of events; and up-coming volunteer training workshops. At this time you may sign up to help or demonstrate one of the many activities that makes Herkimer Home State Historic Site's Sugaring Off event, one of the best in the area and one that is looked forward to by many of the residents of the Mohawk Valley. You may also sign up to help or interpret at any of our future events. Light refreshments will be served. We hope to see you there.

Thank You for Being a Friend

Realizing that in order to be a strong organization you must have a strong membership base, the Friends of Herkimer Home has concentrated on increasing its membership base over the last two years. In January of 2008 the Friends had 87 paid members. By January 2009 the paid membership had surged to 183. Today, we are happy to announce that the membership continues to surge and now numbers 324. We want to thank all of you for supporting the Friends of Herkimer Home and Herkimer Home State Historic Site by becoming a member. If you know anyone who you think would enjoy being a Friend, a membership to the Friends of Herkimer Home makes a great gift. A membership is good for a full twelve months from the time the dues are received and the benefits of being a Friend include:

- Free admission to Herkimer Home
- Notification of up-coming special events, workshops and programs
- Subscription to the quarterly newsletter, *The General's Gazette*
- 10% discount on gift shop purchases
- Reduced registration fee for history camp

Thank you again and we hope to see you in 2010 at one or more of the upcoming events.

Thank You for Renewing Your Membership to the Friends

Sharon Bielicki (Contributing)

Rolf & Janice Brynilsen (Family)

James Bullard (Family)

Shirley M. Naugle (Senior)

Stuart & Judy Talbot (Senior)

Deborah Casler Wyant (Sustaining)



Welcome to the Following New Members

Mark & Katrina Bratbe (Sustaining)

Ester M. Brown (Senior)

David & Gloria Ford (Senior)

Amy Grace (Family)

John F. Herr Jr. (Contributing)

Lance Ingmire (Individual)

Bob & Shirley Schmelcher (Senior)

Lynn Shaw (Family)

Colonial Lighting

Not only did the days become cooler, but by November there was considerably less daylight coming through the windows of colonial homes. As the outdoor tasks of butchering, gathering wood, harvesting crops and building repair were completed in anticipation of shorter and colder days to come, various lighting devices were readied for use to supplement and extend what daylight was available.

Candles by the dozens had been hand dipped or poured in tin molds utilizing the fat from butchered animals. In New England fragrant bayberries were pressed and the wax was used for candles in that region. Many lighting devices made of wood or iron also supplemented the light from the candles or held the candles to utilize the light more efficiently.

The earliest of these supplementary lighting devices was the grease lamp. Fashioned from sheet iron with a fiber wick that was lit, fat scraps, grease, fish or vegetable oil fuelled the flame. Usually they expelled more smoke and smell than light, but the uncovered or covered (betty lamp) grease lamp was used for centuries.

Rush lights were another popular lighting device. They were made of wrought iron (usually with a wooden base). The pith of a rush was soaked in grease, placed in pliers-like jaws and lit. Sometimes they were made with a socket to also hold a

candle. These rush lights were made to fit on table tops with a larger version that stood on the floor and the height was adjustable.

The same holds true for the many types of candleholders that were used. Made from tin, brass, iron, pewter and earthenware these holders were as plain or decorative as the household could afford. Sconces hung on the walls, mostly made of shiny reflective tin. Some were backed with mirrors to better reflect the light out into the room.

Lanterns were made of tin or wood with transparent windows made of glass or horn (horn could be split, flattened and pressed into sheets, then scraped thin to let the light through). Lanterns allowed the colonists to carry light from room to room or outside without fear of the candle being extinguished by the wind.



Candle and rush holder and hand dipped candles Tin candle mold

A look back on 2009



June Afternoon Tea

Tea Committee



July Afternoon Tea

Guests were treated to Cello music provided by Deacon Rendell Torres



Keeping Warm in the Winter

During colonial times, one of the most daunting tasks colonials faced was trying to stay warm during the cold winter months. Although cast iron wood stoves existed in colonial America, they were generally rare in households outside of urban areas. Settlers of the Mohawk Valley typically heated their rooms with fireplaces which during the coldest winter months, at times would not even bring the room temperature above freezing. Warren Johnson, while visiting his brother Sir William Johnson at Johnson Hall, wrote in his journal:

"December the 28th, 1760. it was so cold as to freeze almost anything even by the fire's side: The frost is soe intense, that if you walk in leather shoes & gloves, you are frostbitten."

"January the 11th. 1761. That strong Punch in 20 Minutes, is covered with a Scum of Ice, & Ink on a Table is frozen, before the fire."

"January 24-25. 1761. The weather soe cold that handling Brass, or Iron leaves A Blister on the fingers & in Bed People are cold even with ten blankets on."

Therefore, it was important to have certain implements in the house to help them stay warm during winter. One of those items was a bed warmer. A bed warmer was a brass pan and lid attached to a long wooden handle. By filling the pan with hot embers and running the pan under the covers, colonials could warm up their beds before getting in. Another similar item was the foot warmer. A small box made of brass, tin and wood or just wood with a tin pan inside, it too was filled with hot embers and placed at the feet to keep one's toes warm. To keep your food warm while eating, hot plates were used. These were hollow deep dishes usually made of ceramic or pewter that were filled with hot water. To keep the body warm, colonials dressed in layers of thick wool clothing starting with their long underwear, which stayed on the body until the weather warmed up in the spring. The following quote from the Farmer's Almanac, 1784, gives advice on how to keep warm during winter:

"RECIPE TO KEEP ONE'S SELF WARM A WHOLE WINTER WITH ONE PIECE OF WOOD."

"Take a piece of wood, fling it out the window into the Yard; then run downstairs as hard as you ever can; when you have got it, run up again with the same measure of speed; keep throwing and fetching up until the Exercise shall sufficiently heated you. Renew as often as the occasion shall require!"



Hot plates (ceramic; pewter)



A bed warmer



Foot warmers (brass; tin & wood; wood)

History Camp 2009



Basket Weaving



Corn Husk Warriors



Corn Husk Dolls

HERKIMER HOME STATE HISTORIC SITE

Phone: (315) 823-0398

Fax: (315) 823-0587

E-mail: Thomas.Kernan@oprhp.state.ny.us

This newsletter is a joint publication of Herkimer Home State Historic Site and the Friends of Herkimer Home.

Herkimer Home is one of 18 parks and 6 historic sites in the Central Region, administered by the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. For more information on the site please call or visit our website at www.nysparks.com

Season/Hours:

Mid-May through October:

Wed.- Sat., 10AM-5PM;

Sun. and Monday holidays 1-5 PM

2010 Herkimer Home Special Events

Saturday & Sunday, April 10 & 11: *18th Century Military Encampment (10am to 5pm)*

Sunday, April 11, (1pm to 4 pm): *34th Annual Sugaring Off: A Raid the Sugar Bush.*

Sunday, May 16th, (1pm to 4pm): *18th Century Spring & Garden Fair.*

Wednesday, June 16th, (1pm to 3pm): *Afternoon Tea.*

Sunday, July 4, 11am: *Fort Herkimer Church Independence Day Service followed by a pot luck picnic at Herkimer Home.*

Wednesday, July 14, (1pm to 3pm): *Afternoon Tea.*

Monday-Thursday , July 19-22 (10am - 3pm): *History Camp.*

Friday, July 23 (6:30pm): *History Camp Open House.*

Sunday, August 15, (1pm to 4pm): *Liberty's Hero Commemorating the Life and Death of General Nicholas Herkimer.*

Wednesday, August 18, (1pm to 3pm): *Afternoon Tea.*

Friday, September 12, (6pm): *Annual Colonial Dinner.*

To be continued in the Spring Gazette.

Place
Stamp
Here

***Herkimer Home State Historic Site
200 State Route 169
Little Falls, NY 13365***