

Doors Open Haldimand County at Cottonwood Mansion Museum

Visitors from as far away as India and the Philippines enjoyed Cottonwood Mansion Museum during Doors Open Haldimand County 2015 on Saturday, September 19th. Clayton Lord Spears and Catherine Lady Stidsen greeted visitors. In the Pettit Parlour, Jay and Richard Hoover told the story of their members of the Hoover family and Jay offered suggestions on how to produce the kind of history of a family that he has. A spinning display by Cathy Frayne took place in the Helen Smiley Smith Parlour where visitors were given an overall view of the Mansion and its restoration.

Additional information and displays on the history of the Mansion, its restoration, and past and current activities since the restoration were hosted by Marj Featherston and Doris Held in period costume. The dining room table was set with the Mansion's Bird of Paradise China which added a special touch to that room. Lynne Otterman helped with an in-house raffle of a print of the official original painting of the Mansion by her family member, Emily Otterman. That raffle continues until March, 2016.

Bruce and Lois Gifford and their granddaughters demonstrated period dancing in the Mansion's Music Room and in the afternoon David and Mary Ann Pearson, volunteers and members of the Cottonwood Brass Quintet played Victorian music on antique and modern brass instruments.

The scent of homemade cooking filled the Mansion from early morning to the end of the day. Helen Spears and Foundation President Barbara Held made that happen. Local visitors, of whom there were many, including one who had played in the Mansion before its restoration, were delighted with Barbara's return to this position after a four year absence from it and she kept getting kudos from many visitors delighted with her decision. Visitors purchased Helen's baked goods -- known in the community for her cooking and baking expertise -- and volunteers were treated to lunch and snacks.

Joan McNeice was in the Servants Quarters for the day with the Mansion's own quilt collection. Known throughout Haldimand County and beyond for her own quilts, she offered insights into the craft and along with others who volunteered at the Mansion from the beginning of its restoration, provided delightful stories of that project.

The Mansion's new Administrative Assistant Cindy Stewart-Held helped in a variety of ways throughout the day, photographing and staffing the office and gift shop which she has restored to a warm and welcoming reception area.

Gena, Sean, and Sadee Kelly were all on hand throughout the day serving in a variety of ways. Gena did extensive photography and Sadee and her father had a lemonade stand which brought \$40 in profit to the event. A planned croquet game was cancelled due to weather.

The Mansion's Ballroom and Belvedere were off limits during the day because of repairs needed to the roof which have damaged these areas. But the trustees decided to allow the Ballroom to be viewed from its doorway so that the famous Huber Chest could be seen which was transported to the area by its first settlers. Also, it helped visitors to understand the ongoing costs of keeping a treasure like the Mansion in operating condition.

What struck most volunteers as exceptional was what can only be called the "quality" of the visitors. Some made clear that they had come from considerable distances to see Cottonwood only influenced by articles in the Ontario Farmers Monthly and Ontario Farmer. Several visitors lived in homes built at the same time as Cottonwood and were comparing the Mansion with their own home. Newcomers to Canada were intrigued to learn more of local history from their visit and two Mennonites from Saint Jacobs were pleased to see the roots of the Jakob Huber Family who first brought their ancestors to Canada.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to the event is the number of inquiries about rentals and coming events that are now coming to Cindy Stewart-Held.