School Tours Help Students ‘Walk in the Footsteps of History’

The big yellow buses pull up to the steps of the Visitors’ Center about 10 a.m. The children emerge, talking and laughing and in constant motion. They calm down enough to watch a film about the people and events that shaped Locust Grove over the past 200 years.

And then they start their journey through history — walking in the footsteps of three Presidents of the United States, two famous explorers, a world-renowned artist, and all the people who lived and worked at Locust Grove.

“Educating our community’s youth is one of the most important things we can do as a museum,” says Locust Grove Curator of Collections and Education Mary Beth Williams. “Understanding the past is key to creating a better future for us all. By learning about the struggles our predecessors faced and the often-difficult conditions under which they lived, our student-visitors can better understand how our society, our city, and our country developed.”

Visiting a house museum in particular can bring to life the people who lived and worked there. “With reconstructed outbuildings and 55 acres of fields, gardens, and woods, students receive a full sensory experience of history,” Mary Beth adds.

Students can stand in the rooms where George Rogers Clark lived, Lewis and Clark dined, the Audubons slept, and the children played.

They can hear reminiscences of William Croghan’s advice to her daughters, and enslaved workers sharing stories as they put their children to sleep.

Students can smell the smoke in the woodshop as the carpenter repairs yet another wooden spoon for the cook or shows how logs were hand-sawn into boards.

They can see the difficulty of cooking over a hearth fire and taste cornbread that would have been made by the enslaved cook using corn that would have been grown on the farm.

Life on the frontier was difficult — especially for the enslaved population who lived and worked at Locust Grove.

“While we can’t take the students back in time, our docents do a great job of bringing the past to life,” says Mary Beth. “A little imagination on their part helps students see the livestock in the fields, the neatly planted crops, and the people who kept the farm running and the house in shape. With those insights, students can start to get a picture of what life was like before electricity, plumbing, hospitals, telephones, computers, and video games.”

An average of 3,500–4,000 students each year have visited Locust Grove on field trips. They come from schools in Jefferson County and neighboring counties in Kentucky and Indiana.

“Obviously, we could not give all these tours without our invaluable docents,” Mary Beth adds. “Our docents are amazing, not only for the hundreds of hours they dedicate to educating our community’s youth, but for the energy and passion for history that they pass on to the next generation.”
As I write this on a 7-degree January day, our decision to cancel Locust Grove tours entirely in January makes so much sense!

Last winter we hosted only 165 visitors in January — most of them arriving with one school group on a single day — while in July we had more than 6,000 people come for tours, programs, and rental events.

This is the year that we begin putting our resources where our visitors are — or, more accurately, where they aren’t. We’ve shifted our hours. For the summer months, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, we’ll be open until 5:30 p.m. — giving visitors an extra hour to make the trip out to Locust Grove.

And then, on Thursday evenings this summer, we’ll stay open even later with a special event or program each week — featuring food and drink with performances, workshops, tastings, special tours, and other festive experiences. Many of these will involve new partnerships with community organizations and allow more people to enjoy the beauty of our gardens and its historic setting in the summer twilight.

We’re very excited about our growing partnership with Kentucky Shakespeare. Last December’s presentation of Macbeth by candlelight in the Great Parlour delighted an audience that packed the room’s 60 seats. If you missed it, you’ll get another chance to experience a 17th century play in an 18th century room on Thursday, March 19. That’s when the Kentucky Shakespeare players will return with a presentation of Hamlet in the Great Parlour. And then, the full production of Macbeth will play out on Locust Grove’s grounds on Sunday, May 17.

In our own neighborhood, we’re pleased to work this year with our Friends at the WaterWorks Museum just down River Road on a collaborative school program offering a visit to both sites. After years of being alone out here in the East End, another museum joins us! (See story, page 5.)

Other changes coming this year —

Your favorite Gardeners’ Fair on the second weekend in May will have a few new features, including more of an emphasis on the revived interest in food gardening, and demonstrations and short how-to and hands-on activities in the vendor areas. Perhaps visiting chickens?

So many people loved our Free Fourth of July last year that it will be even bigger this year.

We’ll continue with a with a strong Independence Day program theme, including reenactments and readings of the Declaration of Independence throughout the day.

Also this summer, we’ll be presenting an alternative to July’s usual Jane Austen Festival. That incredibly popular event has been deferred until 2016 due to our partner JASNA’s hosting of the national Jane Austen convention in October. Locust Grove’s event will invite you to join us for a costumed picnic on the grounds while we can still present as wedding guests in a re-creation of the 18th century marriage ceremony of Ann Croghan and Thomas Johnson. For Austen fans, Kentucky Shakespeare will present a reading of some of Austen’s Juveli — her early and very funny works.

These changes to the “when” and “what” and “who” reflect our thinking about our audiences over the last few years. The physical changes presented by the new Master Plan will take longer, but the big shift in our programs has already begun.

The Very Rich and Scandalous Miss Croghan

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 1 PM

A biography of Mary Elizabeth Croghan Scheruer would read like a shocking and adventure-filled soap opera. She was born at Locust Grove — the daughter of William Croghan Jr. and his wife, Mary O’Hara. They all returned to Pittsburgh, her mother’s hometown, where young Miss Scheruer spent most of her youth. But at age 15, she eloped to England with a 43-year old captain in the British Army, Edward Scheruer — rumored to be an illegitimate grandson of King George III. The ensuing scandal filled newspapers in the U.S. and that’s just the beginning. Join longtime Locust Grove leader and author Gwynne Potts to hear the juicy details of the Scandalous Miss Croghan.

What I Saw at Cave Ridge

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 1 PM

Take a journey back to August 1808 to see how Kentucky was transformed from a lawless frontier population to a church-going state. Find out what drew more than 20,000 people (including Kentucky’s governor) to Cave Ridge to a week-long revival. First-person interpreter Eddie Price describes what happened in those fire-lit groves and cave-covered hills during what many contend to be “the pioneering event in the history of frontier camp meetings in America.”

First Wednesday Lecture Series

Our lecture series offers a variety of interesting speakers and unusual topics that relate to the lives of the Croghans, Clarks, and other pioneers. Lectures are held on the first Wednesday of each month, except for January and May. Desserts and beverages are served at 5:30 p.m., with the lecture immediately following. Admission is $5, or $3 for Friends of Locust Grove.
Guests, Interpreters Have Fun at Christmastide

Christmastide fun began the day after Thanksgiving as so of Locust Grove’s first-person interpreters donned layer after layer of clothing under their period dress to be a part of the “Light Up Louisville” parade that ushers in the Christmas season.

“We were occasionally mistaken for the cast of “A Christmas Carol,”” laughs Brian Cushing (far left in photo above). Locust Grove’s program coordinator. “But we took every opportunity to tell folks who we were portraying and encouraging people to attend Christmastide.”

That next Friday and Saturday, Christmastide took over Locust Grove. The 1816 setting
of the “Light Up Louisville” parade that ushers in the Christmas season.

Locust Grove’s Master Plan calls for more use of arts in the interpretation of the historic site. Kentucky Shakespeare is committed to historical performances and has a strong interest in community partnerships and outreach.

Locust Grove already has partnered with Kentucky Shakespeare for a summer camp. “And so, when Brian Cushing (Locust Grove’s program coordinator) and I reached out to Kentucky Shakespeare’s Education Director Kyle Ware — the ideas just flew,” says Carol Ely, HLG’s executive director.

The first partnership productions are an exploration of chamber theatre, with play readings in the Great Parlor of the historic house. Macbeth was a sell-out in December; Hamlet is on the schedule for March. “We’ve also talked about the possibilities of using the grounds as a performance space — with our gardens, hills, woods, and historic buildings as the setting,” Carol says.

Kentucky Shakespeare shares Locust Grove’s interest in the ways that theatre was presented in the past — not just in Shakespeare’s time but afterwards. It has crafted performances using other literature of the past.

“When we mentioned this summer’s Jane Austen alternative festival event, they were enthusiastic about bringing her works into their repertoire,” Carol says. “We’re going a little beyond our usual activities, but we’re trying to do things that are historically accurate in every detail possible,” adds Brian. “We hope we did.”

Locust Grove and Water Tower Museum To Offer Joint Field Trip for Schools

Locust Grove’s Mary Beth Williams, curator of collections and education, and the Louisville Water Tower Park’s Channa Newman, education program specialist, have developed a unique program that allows schools to visit two great sites in one day.

“Our proximity to each other, to the Ohio River, and to the importance of water at both sites are keys elements in our programs,” says Mary Beth. “Our sites are so close to each other and tame away from classrooms so limited these days. To we wanted teachers to be able to bring students to both of our sites in an convenient and productive manner as possible.”

Louisville developed as a city because of the Falls of the Ohio. The Ohio River was the transportation of the 1800s. William Croghan operated a ferry boat from Locust Grove’s riverbank across to Indiana. He also shipped goods to New Orleans via the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

In its early days, Louisville was a most unhealthy place, earning the nickname “Grawyard of the West” due to its standing water and streams, a breeding ground for diseases. Only with the advent of the Louisville Water Company and clean water did the health of the community begin to improve.

Students will visit Locust Grove in the morning — learning about its history and people. “When we have a combo tour, our docents will put even more emphasis on the daily use of water at Locust Grove — hauling it from the well, dealing with chamber pots and wash basins, using cold spring water as a precursor for refrigeration,” explains Mary Beth.

In the afternoon at the Water Tower Park, students will learn how the Louisville Water Company’s clean water system made life so much better for citizens and helped to spur growth of the city and area.

The joint field trip will be $7 per student, free to teachers, and $6 per additional adult, with a maximum of 45 students. The joint tours will start this spring.

Spirit Award Winners: Lynn Swetnam Boone

What began as a “Sure, I’ll help get it started” has become a big part of the volunteer hours spent at Locust Grove by this quarter’s Spirit Award Winner, Lynn Swetnam Boone.

That event she helped start back in March 2005 — Locust Grove’s first Used Book Sale — has grown into a twice-yearly fundraiser that is now one of Locust Grove’s top events. The first sale saw a then-amazing $4,000 in sales.

Last August’s Used Book Sale brought in more than $25,000! Lynn always says that Locust Grove’s Used Book Sales depend upon the core group of book sale volunteers without whom the sales would not succeed. But a special thank you to Lynn.

“She organizes the book sale volunteers, helps sort books during the year, and works long hours during the sales,” points out Locust Grove Curator of Collections and Education, Mary Beth Williams.

Early on, Lynn also recruited some professional book dealers to volunteer their expertise in helping separate the $1 and $2 book donations from those of greater value. “That smart move on Lynn’s part — and the tireless vigilance of book professionals like Charles Bartman and Harvey Venier — has been a huge factor in the growth and popularity of our book sales,” add Mary Beth.

With more than 30 years of service, Lynn is one of the longest-serving volunteers at Locust Grove. Over the years, she’s portrayed family members during the former Candlelight Tours, worked in the old gift shop, been a spinner during school field trips, and even rolled beeswax candles that used to be sold in the Museum Store.

Now, along with her many hours of work on the book sales, Lynn also gives tours on a regular basis to walk-in visitors, helps out with a multitude of school tours and special events, and provides baked goods for First Wednesday Lectures and other special events.

Lynn developed her enthusiasm for Locust Grove from her mother, Mary Jane Swetnam, who also volunteered at Locust Grove for many years. Even while Lynn still was teaching high school

Locust Grove history and humanities, she volunteered during the summers as a docent.

“When I retired in 1997, Locust Grove became a part of my life,” Lynn says. “I was able to spend a lot more time here — much to the delight of the 1816 characters. “We want to give guests what you can’t find in a history book — a living experience of the past that’s accurate in every detail possible,” adds Brian. “We hope we did.”
We went through everything for a good hour or two. Something wasn’t quite adding up about the story that had always been told about George Croghan’s Clark sword, donated by Croghan descendents in rescue with an enormous bag of reference material. Well as I had hoped to. My most direct experience died this past November. Ric served on Locust Grove’s Cushing. His generosity with his time and expertise was. He recently served as a member of our Master Plan President of the Board of Regents (as our governing Board was the...
GREAT BARGAINS AWAIT YOU AT LOCUST GROVE’S MARCH USED BOOK SALE!

SPECIAL MEMBERS’ PREVIEW SALE:
THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 5 PM — 7:30 PM
(Memberships may be purchased at the door.)

OPEN TO PUBLIC:
FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 10AM — 7 PM
SATURDAY & SUNDAY, MARCH 7 & 8,
10 AM — 4:30 PM

Shelves and rows and loads of gently used books (and some new ones!) await you at Locust Grove’s semi-annual Used Book Sale. We expect to have some 22,000 books, all neatly sorted into about 25 categories. History, literature, fiction, mystery/thriller, religion, travel, art, antiques, science/animals, children, foreign language, and so much more. Plus DVDs, CDs, VHS tapes, and even vinyl records.

Most are priced at $1 for paperbacks, $2 for hardbacks. On the other side of the divider, you’ll find a number of books bargain-priced at $3 to $8. We’ll also have a selection of illustrated, rare, collectible, autographed, and sets of books at various prices — all of which are still amazing bargains.

We’re open on Friday until 7:00 p.m. so you can shop after school or work. Our volunteers and staffers constantly restock the tables until we’ve emptied the back room of all the sorted books. On Sunday, we always have special offers — much to the delight of many shoppers who fill bags with their bargains.

All of the books in our Used Book Sales have been donated! We would not have a Used Book Sale without your giving us the books you no longer want or cannot fit on your bookshelves. You may bring your book donations to Locust Grove whenever the Visitors’ Center is open. (Hours are on our website.) We’ll give you a tax receipt and our heartfelt thanks! Proceeds from our Used Book Sales support all of Locust Grove’s programs. Thank you!