

Wornall-Majors Columns



ALEXANDER MAJORS
HISTORIC HOUSE AND MUSEUM

Volume I, Issue XXVI
Winter 2012

Christmas Candlelight 2011

Our annual Wornall House Candlelight Tours were held the second weekend in December this year. Visitors started their tour by participating in a parlor game, Tableau Vivant, in the sitting room. Tableau Vivant means “still image”. The term describes a group of actors or models carefully posed to look like a painting or drawing. This was a popular party game during the mid-nineteenth century, when teams of participants took turns forming a “tableau”, while the other team tried to guess what painting or illustration was being represented. These games often included whatever props the participants could find around the house. For example, a tin cup might be used as a chalice or a hat as a crown.

After a rousing game of Tableau, guests retired to the dining room, where they sampled traditional fruitcake and cherry liquor. In the kitchen they watched open hearth cooking and spoke with the Wornall family cooks, one who recently arrived on the Missouri Frontier from France.



The “McCoy Family” portrays “Washington Crossing the Delaware” in Tableau



Visitors learned period dances in the parlor while musicians played traditional tunes. Upstairs, they looked in on the children, who were getting ready for bed, and sang Christmas carols at the end of their tour.

With this event, we try to make visitors feel as if they are attending a party at the Wornall House in the middle of the 1800’s. We try to keep the favorite activities year after year, but change it enough that regular visitors find something new each year.



Some of our wonderful musicians



The “Harris Family” greets guests upstairs

Mortgage Burning

In September, the Wornall House paid off its long term debt to the Jackson County Historical Society. In case you don't know, the Wornall House was originally restored and owned by the JCHS, but started buying itself years ago. In 2011, we were able to pay off that mortgage, and we celebrated by holding a mortgage burning party. The invitations were designed by Mr. Jim Crosby, and featured a matchbook that opened to reveal "matches" along with the event information. The decorations, designed by **Brenda Eslinger**, owner of **BE...who you are**, featured fire extinguisher centerpieces and fire colored balloons. A live jazz band and sit down dinner completed the scene. The main event, of course, was the burning of the mortgage in a fire pit after dark.

Many people volunteered their time and skills to make this event a success, and there are too many to thank individually. We sincerely hope that all involved know how much we appreciate their efforts. It was a first rate party and made this milestone very special.



Party committee member Chris Arens beside a fire-themed table decoration

Hands-On History

Wornall House Museum became a classroom for medical students this past October. This transformation was quite appropriate since Wornall House served as a field hospital during the Civil War for soldiers of both the blue and the grey. Dr. Michael Monaco is not only a distinguished local physician but also a professor and Civil War re-enactor. He combined his talents to present a class in historical medicine to his students as he has done frequently over the years. His image was complete as he taught in his dark blue Union uniform.



Dr. Monaco discussed a variety of topics including amputations, early anesthesia and the lack of germ theory. He also provided a complete display of medical equipment from the Civil War era from his own collection. Students were encouraged to handle the equipment and ask questions that were both historical and medical in nature. The Wornall House Museum works well as a unique teaching tool for hands on and experiential teaching in a historical setting. (Don't worry. No actual amputations were performed during the presentation.) We look forward to Dr. Monaco's next class at the Wornall House.

Fall Thrills and Chills

Our popular ghost tours and paranormal investigations were back in October along with some other Halloween chills. As usual, we hosted one hour lantern tours through the Wornall House, and hosted paranormal investigators in both houses. We also partnered with the River and Prairie StoryWeavers and Clendening History of Medicine Museum to present "Grimm and Poe-it" in the barn. Lee Ward, former Kansas City funeral director and historian, presented a program on post-mortem photography at Wornall and also a softer version of Victorian funeral traditions for us at the Plaza Library.



A New All-American Christmas Event

Do you remember 1940? Rationing was a big part of life back then and it wasn't easy to live within the restrictions. On a lighter note, couples were swinging it on the dance floor to popular hits such as "String of Pearls" by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra along with Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, and even Doris Day was a big hit singing "Sentimental Journey". Who could refuse a dance to the tune of "In the Mood"?

The era of 1940 may be part of our past, but that doesn't mean it has to stay there! Just to prove the point, the Alexander Majors and John Wornall House



staff hosted a fundraiser in the form of a 1940 USO Show! If you were in the neighborhood during the first part of December, you might have seen all the hubbub. The place was rockin'! If you weren't there, you sure did miss something!

Six decades ago, President Franklin Roosevelt conceived an organization--the **USO**--for the singular, but enduring purpose of reaching out directly from the American people to those in military uniforms who serve them. Put simply, through its unique and selfless personality and character, the USO would deliver "America" to those far from home.

In the 1970's when the draft ended, the need for USO was questioned; but after reviewing its programs, it was decided to keep it. The USO was launched into a new era of peacetime service.

For our own version of the USO Show, several amazing actors put on a highly entertaining musical. Dressed in 1940's high fashion, they danced and sang with full gusto. The show even included the famous "Andrew Sisters". The crowds loved it and the show was a big success!

We would like to thank each and every one who helped put this performance together and the volunteers who helped make it happen. We would also like to thank Jim Stamberger, a local director, who wrote and produced the show at no cost so that all proceeds went to fund the Alexander Majors House.



Queen Victoria's Tea

The Wornall/Majors Houses teamed up with the Plaza Library this December to present a Christmas tea with Queen Victoria. This was a family event that included tea and cookies, and an audience with the Royal Family (the Queen, the Prince Consort, and their daughter Princess Helena). Many of the audience members wore tiaras, white gloves and other sparkly accessories. While waiting to meet the royals, they chatted with re-enactors portraying Mr. and Mrs. Wornall and Mr. and Mrs. Majors. Our resident tea expert, employee Dorene Disbrow, gave an etiquette lesson so that everyone knew the proper way to greet the royals and drink their tea in proper Victorian fashion.



Gravestones Discovered at the Majors House

The extensive collection of pioneer artifacts in the Alexander Majors house and barn includes a surprising discovery: Several gravestones more than 150 years old. Although it seems unusual, for many years the gravestones were kept on the dining room mantel by Louisa Johnston, the great-granddaughter of Alexander Majors, who lived in the house from the 1930s until her death in 1979.

After seeing an old photograph of the gravestones on the mantel, board member Tom Taylor began a search for them. Last fall, they were found covered and stacked in a corner of the brick smokehouse at the rear of the Majors house. A review of genealogical records determined that two of the gravestones belonged to Alexander Majors' grandparents: Alexander Wilson Majors (1776-1846) and Catherine Majors (1767-1855). They lived all their lives and died in Simpson County, Kentucky, and presumably are buried there. How Louisa Johnston obtained the heavy marble gravestones and moved them to Kansas City remains a mystery.

The other three headstones found in the Majors smokehouse belonged to relatives of Miss Johnston on her father's side; her great-grandfather Gavin Johnston (1781-1853), and two of his daughters, and Pantha Weeden Johnston (1828-1844), and Huldah McSpadden Johnston (1825-1845). The daughters died when they were only 16 and 20-years-old. The Johnstons may have been buried in a pioneer cemetery known as Campground Cemetery, in eastern Independence. Again, how and when Miss Johnston obtained the gravestones is a mystery, but early pioneer cemeteries were often neglected and abandoned as later urban development occurred. Reportedly Miss Johnston wanted to place the gravestones on the Majors property as representative of a pioneer family cemetery, but she never accomplished that.

Officials of the Jackson County Historical Society recommend against that now because of the rarity of the headstones and the possibility of theft or vandalism. These are believed to be among the oldest gravestones anywhere in Jackson County.

Because they have been inside for decades they have weathered very little, although two are broken, and the names and dates are as sharp as when the marble stones were carved in the 1840s and 1850s.

Since being rediscovered, the gravestones are now being stored inside the barn office and have been displayed at a few special events. The mystery of how they ended up at the Majors property will probably always remain now that Miss Johnston is gone. Along with other artifacts in the Majors collection, it is the responsibility of our current staff and board to determine how best to preserve and protect these rare gravestones that represent an important part of the Alexander Majors story.

(On a related note, the freighter Alexander Majors and his first wife, coincidentally also named Katherine, but spelled with a "K" rather than a "C", are buried in Kansas City's Union Cemetery with appropriate gravestones there.)



Union Cemetery Event

Some people are asked, "If you could talk to any person from the past, who would you choose?" It is always interesting to see what names come to mind. There is always the name of a family loved one or a special friend. Some folks would enjoy a conversation with a past president, a military general, or another distinguished individual. Unfortunately, no one has invented a time traveling machine that can take us back to a specific time in history. However, on October 1 at the Union Cemetery, it was possible to speak with just a few of the remarkable people from our area. *(Cont'd on page 5)*

The Union Cemetery Historical Society and the Westport Historical Society sponsored a fall tour of their famous burial ground. Actors stood on the graves of notable citizens and portrayed the lives of early founders and developers of the Kansas City and Westport area. Phil Lainhart who works with the cemetery and Liz Dwyer, a staff member of the John Wornall/Alexander Majors House Museums, portrayed the enterprising Alexander Majors and his wife Katherine.

Visitors were able to interact and learn about the lives of these amazing figures. The day proved to be a wonderful and educational experience for everyone.



Wornall Spotlight

Linda Bosilevac is a native of Kansas City, born in the old St. Joseph Hospital, where, incidentally, she worked part time when she was in high school. After high school, Linda attended business college, married and had three children. She traveled extensively while her husband was in the service. Another unique fact about Linda is that she has pet rabbits. She doesn't care for cats and couldn't have a dog as she works full time. A friend put her in touch with the Missouri House Rabbit Society. Her first rabbit, Eby, came from a family who no longer wanted their Easter rabbit. Linda had Eby for 10 years. Eby died, and now she has two rabbits. Apparently these two rabbits (brother and sister) had such a strong affection for each other, they couldn't be parted.

Linda is an exceptional docent. She has been with the Wornall House since 1995 and has helped with many special events, including Candlelight. At Christmas and Easter, she often puts together a special basket to be given as a prize or for a raffle. She is reliable and dedicated and we truly appreciate her service.

Artifact Fact

Did you know: We now have two authentic Conestoga wagons at the Majors House Museum? These heavy rugged vehicles were made in the Lancaster area of Pennsylvania and named for the town of Conestoga. Using native timber which was aged and seasoned for four years, skilled craftsmen provided them for the freight business as well as for agriculture.

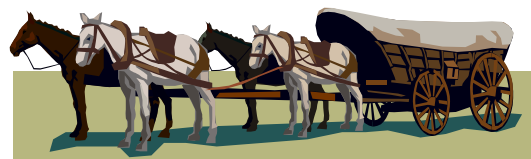
They were built in the 18th and early 19th centuries with a unique curved bed which allowed the weight to be distributed toward the center and kept the load from shifting when going up and down hills. The wagons could carry 3500 pounds to as much as 6500 pounds.

The driver had no seat but would walk along side or ride the left rear horse. There was also a plank on the left side known as a "lazy board" which retracted into the bed on which the driver could sit or stand. Drivers would control the team by voice or whip signals rather than reins. This driving from the left is likely the origin of our current custom of driving automobiles in America.

In the East, horses were used to pull wagons and a good team could cost \$1000 to \$2000. In the more rugged landscape of the West, oxen were found to be more practical and this was the practice of Mr. Majors. As many as twelve oxen made up a team. The wagons cost \$250 to build compared to \$70,000 for a museum specimen today!

Some drivers put a decorative set of bells on the harness of which they were quite proud, so when a driver was assisted in an emergency by another driver he would sometimes give him his set as a reward. Hence the saying "arriving with bells on" indicated an uneventful journey.

Drivers were a rough lot and fond of whiskey and tobacco. Mr. Majors had them sign a pledge to abstain from drink during employment. They did enjoy their tobacco and the small cheap cigars they smoked were known as Conestogas or "Stogies" which prevails to this day.



A Historic Artifact of the Western Frontier

One hundred and forty-five years ago, one of Alexander Majors' wagon trains headed across Nebraska with supplies for the Army's Ft. Mitchell in western Nebraska. The collection at Alexander Majors House displays a rare artifact from that journey, a leather-bound 1866 wagon train log book. The book belonged to 36-year-old Barnett Jackson Johnston, agent for the company. He was the grandfather (on her father's side) of Louisa Johnston, Alexander Majors' great-granddaughter (on her mother's side) who lived in the house and kept it preserved for nearly 40 years.

The book's hand-written notations show the wagon train left Nebraska City, June 28, 1866 and returned September 7, 1866. The 29 men listed as employees were paid an average of about \$80, just barely over \$1 a day for their 71 days of hard work. The log lists 26 wagons in the train, pulled by 267 oxen/cattle and four mules. The train's inventory includes 400 ox shoes and five pounds of ox nails for the journey.

The book contains seven pages of rules and regulations and instructions for wagon masters. Rule #1 is: "Swearing, gambling and intemperance will not be allowed in camp or on the plains." (Majors was very religious. His wagon trains did not carry whiskey and he did not allow his men to drink.)

Another vital instruction is: "Do not allow the men to whip their teams at all." (It was said the fastest way to get fired by Alexander Majors was to mistreat an animal.)

The instructions continued: "We expect our trains to observe the Sabbath, and whenever an opportunity occurs to hear preaching, embrace it. We want our men to pay due respect to all persons they meet on the road, whether Indians or Whites, as many difficulties occur from abuse and insult offered to inoffensive people" (That is an amazing rule considering that in 1866 the United States was still heavily engaged in Indian wars in the west. It shows the generous, tolerant, and ethical philosophy of Mr. Majors.)

Rations and supplies carried on the train

included 3,000 pounds of flour, 1,500 pounds of bacon, 180 pounds of coffee, 300 pounds of sugar, 150 pounds of beans, and 150 pounds of dried apples. That gives a general idea of the type of menu out on the plains. To cook for and feed the men, the log book inventory lists: three each of mess pans, fry pans, kettles, skilletts, and coffee pots, along with 30 tin cups, 30 tin plates, and 30 iron spoons. Wagon masters were responsible for checking out and returning all such utensils.

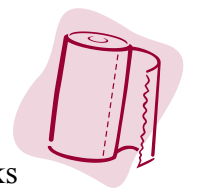
The log book is an incredible artifact from our collections that truly represents the development of the great American west. It is on display in Alexander Majors' office, along with two of the pocket-sized Bibles that Majors' freighting firm gave to all of its employees, dated 1859 and 1860. They can be seen during tours of the home.



Rare Artifacts: An 1866 wagon train log book (right) belonging to B.J. Johnston and (left) an 1860 Bible Majors' firm gave to employees.

Wish List

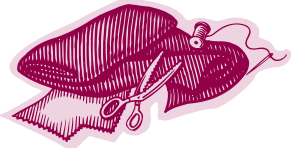
- ◆ Paper towel
- ◆ Cleaning supplies like 409 etc.
- ◆ Toilet paper
- ◆ Copy paper
- ◆ Paper plates, cups, spoons and forks
- ◆ Coffee Beans (for kids to grind on tours)
- ◆ Yarn
- ◆ Candlewax for melting and dipping candles
- ◆ Nice taper candles to use in the houses
- ◆ Swiffer Duster and mop refills
- ◆ Liquid hand soap



Camp Wornall News—We Need Your Help!

In the midst of the winter, plans are being made for our 2012 summer camps. We are making a shopping list of needed supplies and are asking for your help. If you are downsizing, you may have supplies we need. For those of you who like Altoids, please save the empty containers. Last summer we made calling card containers with the help of sand paper and spray paint and sent the campers home with calling cards from their friends. An imagination and a yard of muslin makes a possible bag for a fur trapper, a soldier's haversack or a keepsake bag for a girl on a wagon train going west. If you love to shop use a coupon and buy a yard of muslin for our sewing chest. A used CD or DVD makes the wheel of the drop spindles we make on sheep shearing day. Please help us by donating the following:

- ◆ Altoid containers
- ◆ Muslin—last year we used 60 yards so any donation would be appreciated.
- ◆ Sharpies
- ◆ Quart jars with lids for storing bread and butter pickles
- ◆ A large tarp
- ◆ A ream of card stock
- ◆ Cotton fabric for beanbags and clothes for our cornhusk dolls
- ◆ Thread, needles and embroidery hoops
- ◆ Baby food jars with lids for making butter or ink
- ◆ Croquet set



Did you know that the Wornall House survives entirely on donations, admissions, and memberships? If you are not a member, we hope that you will consider joining now. Members receive free guided tours, discounts in the gift shop, free or discounted admissions to selected special events, and the satisfaction of helping to preserve and interpret one of Kansas City's important historical landmarks. You may download a membership form from our website, or fill out and send in the membership coupon below.

Yes, I (we) would like to support the John Wornall House Museum by becoming a new member!

- _____ \$25.00 Student or Senior
- _____ \$35.00 Individual
- _____ \$50.00 Family
- _____ \$_____ contribution for memorial or honorary

- Society of 1858
- _____ \$100.00 Contributing
 - _____ \$250.00 Sponsoring
 - _____ \$500.00 Sustaining
 - _____ \$1,000.00 and above Benefactor

Name: _____
 Address: _____

 Phone: () _____
 Email: _____

For credit card use: \$ _____ Total
 MC/Visa/Discover # _____
 Expiration Date _____
 Signature _____

Don't Miss Our Upcoming Events!

Majors House

February 11: Frozen Charlotte cookies and craft program (in partnership with the Toy and Miniature Museum)

March 11: Women's History Month program (in partnership with Ernie Miller Nature Center)

April 13 -15: Civil War Battle and Reenactment

June 24: Huckleberry Finn Readers Theater performance (in partnership with the Westport Arts Council)

Wornall House

April 28: Herb Sale

May 12: Mother / Daughter Tea (with the Jane Austin Society)

June 9: Garden Tour

June through August: Summer Camps, dates TBA

Special Thanks to our Newsletter Contributors!

Liz Dwyer, Chuck Beesley, Jeannie Gilbert, Sharon Cassidy,
Tom Taylor, and Emily Sloan

A frozen doll? Intrigued?

Here's one clue – her name is Charlotte. Now you're wondering who is Charlotte and why is she frozen. Am I right?

To solve this puzzle, you'll definitely want to be with us on Saturday, February 11, at the Alexander Majors barn. The mystery will unravel beginning at 2:00. We are partnering with the Toy and Miniature Museum to present a program open to all ages. You will learn all about this doll who was the must have toy in the 1800's, and then use her in a great craft project. Of course, cookies will be involved. Tickets are only \$6 per person and you may pay at the door. However, please let us know you are coming by emailing Kandice@wornallhouse.org.



Visit www.wornallhouse.org or alexandermajors.com for information on upcoming activities.

Museum Staff
Kandice Walker, Director
Elizabeth Dwyer, Assistant to Director
Marguerite Milliken, Assistant
Kate Gleeson, Weekend Staff
Doreen Disbrow, Weekend Staff
Jeanne Gilbert, Weekend Staff
Sharon Cassidy, Weekend Staff

www.wornallhouse.org

Kansas City, Missouri 64113

6115 Wornall Road



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