

Kids Korner

A Farmer's Journal Brings History Alive

LORETTA GOLDEN

**Cambria Co. Correspondent
PORTAGE (Cambria Co.)** —

Webster's Dictionary defines "journal" as "an account of day-to-day events" or a "record of experiences, ideas, or reflections kept regularly for private use." In 1866, James Itell began keeping a journal and continued to do so for a period of six weeks. At the time he began his diary, Itell was a 16-year-old farmer who lived in the Portage-Munster area of Western Pennsylvania. The journal consists mainly of "one-liners" — some sentences, phrases, and even just single words. It also contains historical facts and agricultural recordkeeping.

This diary was the impetus for a project coordinated by Portage Area High social studies teacher, Gary Yusko, and St. Joseph elementary teacher, Kathleen Shuler. Yusko is also the president of the Portage Area Historical Society and Shuler is the director of the Portage Station Museum. Yusko's eighth grade Social Studies class researched and presented a program for approximately 500 students from the Portage area.

Currently, the museum is featuring a farming exhibit entitled "To Everything There Is A Season — A Farm Journal." This exhibit is based on the journal of James Itell. All of the students toured the museum, heard brief talks by museum volunteers concerning agriculture during the 1800s and were then shuttled by school bus to Crichton-McCormick Park in Portage. At the park, Yusko's class was busy preparing food similar to that described in the 1860s journal. All 500 students

were treated to tastes of sausage, bacon cooked over open fire, buckwheat pancakes, pure maple syrup, popcorn popped over open fire, pumpkin butter, mountain pies, homemade butter, apples and apple cider, corn mush, and everyone's favorite — homemade ice cream. The class even rented a large hand-crank ice cream freezer (Made 3 gallons at a time) from a local hardware store.

Besides the food items one of the highlights was hearing the students speak of life during the 1860s. A few described 1800's baseball and croquet and eighth-grader Nick Gruse, dressed as a Confederate soldier, captivated his younger audiences with descriptions of field hospitals during the Civil War.

Quite a bit of planning and effort went into the day and it was a learning experience and fun time for most who attended. Fifth-grader Chalsea Kline especially enjoyed the talk on hog butchering and came to realize through this discussion that no part of the hog was wasted. Everything was used for something.

The students who presented the day-long program gained an appreciation for this "hands-on" learning and a different way in which to put their research to work. They also enjoyed doing this for the younger students to help them to better understand life during the Civil War period of our country.

One of the leisure activities which James Itell enjoyed during the 1860s and 1870s was "ballooning." Draw a picture of what you think a hot air balloon looked like at this time.



Sam Timura, school administrator, demonstrating sausage making for this group of boys.



Jenny Godish passing out popcorn which she popped over an open fire.



Nick Gruse, eighth grader dressed as a Confederate Soldier, is discussing gun powder, field hospitals, and lack of anesthesia during the Civil War. If a soldier was injured, he'd have to "bite the bullet" or a piece of wood for the pain!



Natalie Kittell and Beth Golden making buckwheat pancakes from locally grown buckwheat. Buckwheat was mentioned many times in Itell's journal. It appears to have been a staple in this area in the mid 1800s.