

Diary Reveals Life For Turn-Of-The-Century Farm Wife

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LANDISVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — Watching Eileen Bender Johns working in the garden or in the kitchen of the Amos Herr Homestead, Landisville, transports you back in time.

Dressed in the traditional garb of a woman of the early 1900s, Eileen impersonates Emma Rohrer Herr, born in 1867. Eileen tediously researched the diaries of Emma to give an honest portrayal of Emma's life.

Eileen, who is also acting curator for the Herr Homestead, will share the story of Emma's life as a farm wife on May 27 at 7:30 p.m. at the Amos Herr House. There is no admission charge.

The Amos Herr Homestead is a Pennsylvania German farm listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Herr House is open to tour weekends (see details at the end of this article). During the tour, guides dress in 1890 garb and talk about the house as if they were living in it during that period.

Eileen said that Herr was well known in the area as a humanitarian, athlete, world traveler, a public servant, and a devoted member of his church.

The date of the oldest part of the house is unknown, but a large addition was constructed in 1852. In 1913, the Herrs oversaw major renovations to the house.

Only 11 people lived in the house since it was erected. The first Herr family settled in the house in 1844. Amos Herr was the last resident. Amos had been an only child and had no children. When he died in 1987, he donated the 67-acre farm to the township to be made as a park for children.

Herr was quoted as saying, "Parks are places that provide recreation of many kinds where people can relax and forget the cares and burdens of the day and thus become refreshed and strengthened for the problems of tomorrow."

After the acquisition, the township was uncertain what to do with the house. A public auction was held in which many of the furnishings were sold.

In 1990, the Amos Herr Foundation was formed by those interested in saving the house. Extensive repairs were made to maintain the beauty of the farmhouse both inside and outside. Wallpaper and

paint authentic of the period were used.

Some original pieces of furniture were donated back to the Foundation when the buyers heard that the place was to be restored for public viewing. Other pieces representative of that era have been purchased or donated by interested persons. In fact, one room is devoted to a historical library with many archival displays. One is a hair remembrance book compiled by a 20-year-old woman in 1840. A segment of hair from family and friends is braided and the name of the person is recorded in the book.

In the large kitchen, a wood stove similar to what Emma used is in place. The farm kitchen has all the details to make it appear as if Emma was in the middle of baking with baking ingredients and utensils set on the table.

The spacious dining room and parlor is separated by pocket doors. Area rugs in each room disguise the fact that the wooden floors only cover the borders of the rooms and not the whole floor.

"This is typical of the frugal German way of making things look fine on the outside," Eileen said.

One of the bedrooms has a display of textiles and clothing from the era. A wedding trousseau spills from a trunk. The wedding gown and the trousseau dresses reflect the slim waists of the era when corsets were used to tightly constrain. Shoes, too, appear to be more narrow than most women can wear today. That may be indicative of women wearing tight shoes to make their feet appear smaller.

A furnished bedroom, sewing room, nursery, and a "cast-off" room are also located upstairs.

"No doubt hired help slept in this room," Eileen said of the room which still has the original unpainted plastered walls and unfinished floor boards.

Eileen's dedication and enthusiasm often takes priority in her life over her family and J & J drapery business. Amos Herr was her former history teacher, and her favorite. When the Foundation was established, Eileen volunteered even before she saw the inside of the house. She made the swags and jabots for the numerous windows and continues to oversee many of the constantly developing activities for the house.

Eileen was the first person to decipher the sloppily written diar-

ies. The diaries record prolific details about the weather, what the Herr family ate, and what Emma did during the day. Little personal feelings were revealed.

The Tuesday, May 27 lecture is free. In addition, the Keeping Room gift shop located in the cellar area will be open to purchase

handcrafted items and a replica of the Amos Herr House which is part of the Cat's Meow series.

The house is also open for tour from 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, April 1-Oct. 31. Admission is \$4 for adults. Seniors, students, and groups are \$3 per person, and children under 12 are

admitted free. Group and private tours are also available by calling (717) 898-8975.

Directions from Lancaster: Take Harrisburg Pike West and turn right on Nissley Road at the Hempfield Township Municipal building before entering Landisville.



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