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Past Times

Group offers historic tours of South St. Louis County

by Linda Briggs-Harty

08/07/2009 - History lays heavy around White Haven, the farmhouse where Civil War Union General and former President Ulysses S. Grant lived with his father-in-law Frederick Dent, his wife Julia Dent Grant and their four children.



This two-story log home, known as the Bishop-Long House, is located on Pardee Road and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. William Lindsay Long, a prosperous farmer, political figure and slave owner, built the house for his family in the 1820s. The home's last owners, medical doctors George and Ethel Bishop, deeded the house to St. Louis County in 1975. photo by Diana Linsley (click for larger version)

The federal historic site off Pardee Road is just one of the more visible icons from the past.

All over South St. Louis County, from Crestwood to Oakville and other communities in between, historic homesteads, churches and more dot the once rural scene.

Unlike White Haven, or the notable Hardscrabble cabin at Grant's Farm off Gravois, many of the old buildings lay hidden under modern facades. Several no longer exist, save in records kept by the Sappington-Concord Historical Society.

Longtime Historical Society Member and Newsletter Editor Terry Rupp, along with the Society's Archivist Ross Wagner, bring to light these little-known legacies in tours for young and old alike.

Every fall, they offer bus tours to fifth graders in the Lindbergh School District in keeping with the Society's Past and Present Partnership started three years ago.

On July 3, they offered a bus tour (air-conditioned) for adults as well, driving by places of interest and stopping at a few key sites.

According to Rupp, whose forebears farmed and owned a nursery on land now inhabited by St. Anthony's Medical Center, all the tour takers love the link to the distant (and not so distant) past.

"The students, in particular, are so attentive on the tours," said Rupp. "They're blown away when Ross talks about how they built the log cabins, chinking them with weeds, mud and other materials, and used other primitive methods.

"They light up when they hear kids



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took a bath only once a week," she laughed.

Drawing upon sites in the Society's history book, published in 1999, Rupp and Wagner lead tour takers roughly 16 miles (an hour drive time) around the Concord-Sappington area.



Terry Rupp and Kathryn Inabnit outside the Bishop-Long House. Inabnit and her husband, Park Ranger Larry Inabnit, are the home's live-in caretakers. photo by Diana Linsley (click for larger version)



Some of the tour highlights include:

- St. Lucas UCC Church on Denny Road, organized in 1880.
- A slave house on the Sappington Plantation.
- Sale Plantation, where Virginia natives Joseph and Margaret Sale and their five children kept 24 slaves (largest number in the area).
- Kennerly Plantation, some 422 acres from Tesson Ferry to Gravois, a portion on which tour guide Rupp's great grandparents farmed and her grandparents ran a nursery.
- Pipkin Plantation on Southwick Drive, built by slaves in the 1830s for War of 1812 Colonel Philip Pipkin and his family (11 kids by first wife, eight by the second).
- Concord Farmer's Club, started in the 1870s with members today, many descendants of original settlers.
- Concord School off Concord School Road, a circa 1840s log cabin hidden under modern overlay.
- Site of John "Jack" Sappington's 2,400-acre plantation, occupied now, in part, by Lindbergh High School.
- Site of original Sappington School off Baptist Church Road, where Julia Dent Grant attended as a girl.



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Restoration is ongoing at the Christoph Helm Home, later known as the Robert and Selma Schulz Dressel home, on Concord School Road. photo by Diana Linsley (click for larger version)

- Bishop-Long House, the two-story log structure built in 1821 by William Lindsey Long after returning from a foray to set up the town of Fenton. He and wife Elizabeth Sappington reared 16 children here.

At the Bishop-Long House, Rupp, Wagner and tour takers exit the bus and enter a bygone era.

Trees surround this historic hideaway off of Pardee Road near Grant's Farm. Popping up all over are surprise lilies planted by George and Ethel Bishop, husband and wife doctors living on the site. The couple deeded the property to St. Louis County in 1972.

Current caretakers, park ranger Larry Inabnit and wife Kathryn, reared three children in the cabin that boasts four fireplaces. The Bishops had modernized the cabin somewhat.

"It's been wonderful. When we moved in with our kids, I thought about all the babies that were born here, all the Christmases celebrated and the other imprints," said Kathryn Inabnit. "Wildlife is abundant -- fox, turkey, owls and more. We even had a flying squirrel in the living room."

The first inhabitants of the home, the Longs, had 16 children. William Lindsay Long arrived in the Gravois Settlement with his parents in 1808. After marrying Elizabeth Sappington in 1808, he starting building White Haven but sold it unfinished to Theodore and Ann Lucas Hunt.

Buying some 408 acres along the Meramec River, he laid out the town of Fenton, named after his maternal grandmother.

Since the venture wasn't taking off, he returned to Gravois Settlement, building the log home on what is now Pardee Road and setting up a grist and saw mill on the farmstead.

Long helped survey Gravois Road as road overseer and acted as postmaster of the Sappington Station.



Sappington Cemetery is located in Crestwood on the north side of Watson Road at Watson Industrial Drive. Established in 1811, it is one of the oldest family cemeteries in St. Louis County, and in Missouri. photo by Ursula Ruhl ([click for larger version](#))

After touring the Bishop-Long site, Rupp, Wagner and crew board the bus and continue down Pardee. They pass the transplanted Mark Sappington house, built in 1841 at Old Sappington and Watson roads. The American Gothic is one of only two such homes left in the state, said Rupp.

The tour group exits the bus at Sappington Cemetery off Watson Road in Crestwood. There, participants see stones harking back to the American Revolution era.

The story goes that John "Jack" Sappington, patriarch of a healthy clan, lived up yonder from the cemetery. When wife Jemima Fowler died and lay in the family plot, Jack sat on his cabin porch, shotgun in hand, warding off natives he thought inclined to digging up and scalping her remains.

Rupp looks forward to a fall program aligned with the Past and

Present Partnership called "Tombstone Tales."

Wearing period costumes, she and other Society members don roles of settlers around the area at two cemeteries -- St. Lucas and St. John UCC. The scripts capture the characters' lives, Rupp said.

A resident of Wildwood, Rupp wants to move back to her roots.

"This is home," she said. "There's lots of history here."



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