

# Homestead highlights changing traditions of Christmas

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

The John R. Park Homestead and Conservation Area was transported back in time 150 years Dec. 3, for the re-creation of an 1850's Christmas.

With the house decorated with fresh evergreens, feathers and popcorn on strings, homestead staff treated visitors to a very different holiday celebration.

"It wasn't a commercial event like it is today," said Janet Cobban, curator of the homestead. "If you wanted to decorate your house you would have to go out in the woods and look for greenery or berries and you'd have to chop down your tree because there'd be no one selling Christmas trees. In fact, most families didn't have Christmas trees in their houses. Usually you went to a public place like a church or a hall to see one."

Not everyone exchanged gifts either, Cobban said of old-fashioned Christmas celebrations. When they did, they were usually homemade.

But Cobban said some things have always remained the same, such as a big meal, religious services and getting together with

family.

"That doesn't change too much over time," she said.

With vegetables boiling in brass pots, bread browning in a bake kettle and a goose roasting in a reflector oven, a re-creation of a typical Park family Christmas feast showed the affluent family didn't skimp on the delicacies of the day.

Their Christmas Eve dining room spread included fresh citrus, pomegranates and pineapples, which indicated their wealth, said homestead staff member Steven Szakaly, who was dressed in 1850's style clothing for the event. The Parks would also have crystal glasses and bone-handled silverware laid out across the dinner table for a feast that included creamed potatoes with mint, buttered parsnips and mulled cider, Szakaly said.

"It was a different time," said homestead staff member Nancy Hager. "There was no electricity, central heating or plumbing. It was so new that people were just starting out their traditions."

The annual Christmas in the Country event has been celebrated at the homestead since the museum opened to



John R. Park Homestead staff member Nancy Hager stands in front of a replica of a 19th century Christmas tree during Christmas in the Country, Dec. 3. The annual event featured live holiday music and a tour through the Christmas-themed Park home.

the public in 1978.

Other activities included roasting chestnuts, caroling to the sounds of live holiday

music and creating ornaments for a replica of a 19th century Christmas tree.

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