



POSTINGS FROM PRIESTLEY HOUSE

Newsletter of The Friends of Joseph Priestley House

Number 42 Fall 2008

www.josephpriestleyhouse.org

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History Camp 2008: A History Mystery

The mystery is solved! The theme for this year's Summer History Camp was "Joseph Priestley House: A History Mystery", and 13 junior gum-shoes tested their historical sleuthing skills as they tried to find out how Joseph Priestley's house in Northumberland became a museum. Campers interviewed eyewitnesses, including Joseph Priestley (portrayed by FJPH member Ronald C. Blatchley) and Colonel David Taggart (portrayed by John Moore), who was present at the 1874 Centennial of Chemistry, an international meeting of chemists held in Northumberland, PA to commemorate Priestley's 1774 discovery of oxygen. History campers examined exhibits, investigated images, pondered plates from Priestley's publications, and probed printed works like newspapers to uncover the trail of events leading to the commemoration of Priestley's home as a public place where all could come to learn.

A small brick building served as the first "museum" on the present historic site: the Pond Building, built by Penn State University's Chemistry Department Alumni in the 1920's, and dedicated to the late George Gilbert "Swampy" Pond. In 1983, a traveling exhibit composed by the American Chemical Society to celebrate Joseph Priestley's 250th birthday came to rest in the Pond building, and it contained larger-than-life sized copies of Priestley's bookplates, engravings from his works, and other clues which campers used to solve the mystery at hand. This year, campers created their own museum exhibit outside the Pond Building to show their families the results of all their investigations.

According to the evidence, History Camp was a fun, full-fledged success this year: campers filled out report cards for the program, writing things like "I like it all" and "History rules!" Many thanks to our volunteers, junior volunteers, and FJPH members, who make programs like Summer History Camp possible at Priestley House.



Derrek Reitz and campers search for clues in the library



Campers exhibit their clay 'art facts'

Friends of Priestley House Hosted in the UK

By Jim Birch

Priestley re-enactor Ronald Blatchley and his wife Frances visited the UK during October 2008. They were hosted by Jim and Lesley Birch in Birstall. During their time in the UK they visited Leeds and followed the "Joseph Priestley Leeds Heritage Trail" starting at the Priestley statue in City Square, taking in Mill Hill Chapel, William Hey's house (friend of Joseph Priestley), Ogle's bookshop (original site of Leeds subscription library) and finally the new library where Geoffrey Forster showed them round.

An excellent day was spent in Birmingham partially following the guide by Dr Malcolm Dick and Peter Leather, "A Trail of 18th Century Birmingham" (sites open to the public www.birminghamheritage.org.uk). This included a visit to Soho House, home of Mathew Boulton and meeting place of the Lunar Society. Soho House is covered with scaffolding at the moment and is being cleaned in readiness for the 200 years celebration of Mathew Boulton's death (17th August 1809). Local to Birstall, Priestley sites were also visited, including his Birthplace, his Aunt Sarah's former residence (now Old Hall Pub), Martha Crouch's house in Gildersome where the Leeds portrait hung for many years.

Away from Priestley, visits included the small port of Whitby, home of the famous Captain Cook and the Cook museum, Whitby Abbey, inspiration of the novel Dracula, Robin Hood's Bay, an old smugglers haunt, and Scarborough where the grave of Anne Bronte, sister of the famous Bronte writers was visited. Bronte sites were also visited in Liversedge, Hightown and the Bronte village of Haworth. Ilkley Moor, Bolton Abbey and the Spa town of Harrogate were also included on the tour.

Fran Blatchley's birthday was celebrated with a meal held at the New Charnwood pub - this pub is included in the *Guide to Real Ale*, a publication that is nationwide in the UK supporting real hand pulled ale.

XXXXXXXXX..... PRESIDENT'S MESSAGEXXXXXXXXX

As yet another year comes to an end, the Friends of Joseph Priestley House look back on 2008 with pride and satisfaction. Much good work was accomplished by the staff, volunteers, committees and board. We have completed many tasks from our Strategic Plan and we have finished a thorough and engaging Interpretation Plan for the historic site.

In 2009, we will welcome many talented individuals to our board, including our newest addition, Bill Simpson of Lewisburg. Bill will be replacing the Reverend Jim Gold, who left the board in October. Jim was a Priestley descendant and a wonderful asset to our group, and his cheery disposition and practicality will be missed by all.

In October, the Friends hosted the Susquehanna Branch of the American Association of University Women. 28 visitors enjoyed a tour of the house, followed by a fascinating discussion on a day in the life of "Mary Russell" led by Brooke Dearman of the Priestley House staff. The group then adjourned to the home of Margaret Weirick for a delicious catered lunch from Townside Garden Café. Special thanks to everyone who made the event such a success!

Finally, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's "Plan for the Future" is still causing us great concern. The Joseph Priestley House is one of 25 historic sites owned and operated by the PHMC, which gets the majority of its funding from state revenues. As many of you already know, Pennsylvania's revenue stream continues to decline and there will be significantly fewer resources to support historic preservation. This lack of funding will have a dramatic if not tragic affect on the future of the Joseph Priestley House. Now more than ever the support of our membership is vitally important. Please stay tuned for further developments as we navigate into uncharted waters ahead.

Thanks again for your support and best wishes for a happy holiday season.

Respectfully submitted,

XXXXXXXXX..... MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTORXXXXXXXXX

Looking back over 2008, it is interesting to note:

• Visitation numbers at Priestley House seem to be holding 'steady' a much nicer trend than experiencing declining visitation as in the past few years. If all goes well in the next few weeks, the JPH could match or perhaps exceed 2007's visitor total of 1,709.

- January 2007 – October 2007 = 1,465 visitors
- January 2008 – October 2008 = 1,458 visitors

• Investments of volunteer hours made by members of Friends JPH and others experienced an increase. I thank each and every one of you for your contributions!

- January 2007 – October 2007 = 527 hours
- January 2008 – October 2008 = 616 hours

• The decision to move to hourly guided tours this past spring has been successful. Tours are now available on the hour from 10 am – 3 pm Wed. through Sat. and 12 Noon – 3 pm Sunday. Gift shop sales may have increased because people sometimes need to wait a bit for the next tour, and viewing and photo opportunities on the grounds have also increased. This last outcome could provide justification to PHMC for installation of a few comfortable benches and production of a brief 'grounds tour on your own' brochure, funds for which could be made available by the Friends JPH.

On another note, the Bureau of Historic Sites & Museum's (BHSM) 'Plan for the Future' - the comprehensive review of operations to determine the highest and best use for all state-owned museums and historic sites remains underway. Some of you have already heard about and/or

**FRIENDS OF
JOSEPH PRIESTLEY HOUSE**

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- Amanda Kessler, *President*
- Edward Lyon, *Vice- President*
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- James H. Gold
- Jack Russel Holt II
- Susan Brook
- Cindy Inkrote
- Thomas Martin
- Andrea Bashore, *Ex Officio*
mbashore@state.pa.us

Site Staff

- Andrea Bashore, *Site Administrator*
- Brooke Dearman, *Custodial Guide*

**Joseph Priestley House is a
National Historic Landmark and a
National Historic Chemical Landmark**

administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission with support from the Friends of Joseph Priestley House, a registered Charitable organization whose official registration and financial information may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling within PA 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Visit

www.josephpriestleyhouse.org

or

Call 570-473-9474

for

Priestley House hours of operation
Friends membership information
& application

Individuals who need special assistance or accommodation to visit Joseph Priestley House should call 570-473-9474 in advance to discuss their needs. Pennsylvania TDD relay service is available at (800) 654 -5984.

have participated in portions of the review at the internal level. Next steps involve meetings the BHSM will convene with legislators and public audiences to gather additional data and ideas addressing the bureau's ability to continue to provide 'core' functions in light of dwindling resources. I have been told that every site, including Joseph Priestley House, will be impacted in some way. If you would like to voice your concerns directly to representatives from the BHSM through participation in the public meeting, please contact me and I will send you details as they become available. Please continue to read the Friends newsletter for updates on this looming and uncertain situation. You may also contact me at mbashore@state.pa.us to ask questions about our progress toward the 'Future' of Priestley House at any time.

Let us all work in partnership to ensure that Joseph Priestley's American home and laboratory will not only be preserved for future generations, but that the site will remain accessible to visitors seeking to learn about Joseph Priestley's life and his years spent in Northumberland, PA.

May you all enjoy a peaceful holiday season.

Andrea Bashore

Celebrate Twelfth Day - You Are Invited!

Greet the new year with historic tradition during an open-house style Twelfth Day program at Priestley House from 1 to 4 pm on Sunday, January 4, 2009 (weather permitting). Visitors will meet characters from the past, telling tales and observing winter holiday and turn-of-the-year customs popular in England and America during the times of Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) in period rooms decorated with simple winter holiday greens.

Beginning at 1 p.m., visitors will be ushered in with a Happy New Year greeting, then meet Dr. Priestley in the back kitchen of the Priestley House where he will cut pieces of 12th Day cake and award crowns and jester caps to those lucky enough to find a bean or a clove in their cake. As in Priestley's day, visitors and interpreters will make toasts to the new year as punch is served.

Costumed guides throughout the house will portray Priestley family members, friends and neighbors, including Mary Priestley, portrayed by Esther Walter of Northumberland. "Susquehanna Jack", portrayed by John Moore, Northumberland will offer winter and holiday tales.

Dr. Priestley will be in his laboratory at 1:30 and 2:30 p.m. during presentations of "Dr. Priestley's Chemistry", made by Ronald C. Blatchley of New Berlin. Seating for chemistry demonstrations is limited and available on a first-come, first served basis.

Ongoing activities throughout the afternoon will include serving of cake and punch, hands-on History Trunk activities for children and their families, Twelve Days of Christmas games, and the Elizabeth Ryland Priestley bedchamber exhibit. Admission charged.



Dr. Attila Pavlath, keynote speaker for SVS-ACS anniversary

Susquehanna Valley ACS Celebrates 50th Anniversary

The Susquehanna Valley Section (SVS) of the American Chemical Society (ACS) marked its 50th Anniversary this year with a celebration held September 13, 2008 at Joseph Priestley House. Thirty-four members and guests convened to tour the historic site, meet colleagues and friends, hear a number of addresses, and receive awards. The group also enjoyed live chemistry experiments presented in the Priestley laboratory by section member and Priestley re-enactor Ronald C. Blatchley.

Andrea Bashore, Priestley House site administrator and Amanda Kessler, President, Friends of Joseph Priestley House, welcomed attendees to the event. Introductory remarks were given by Ron Supkowski, section Chair-elect, who also talked about accomplishments of the 'Susquehanna Valley Section Today'. Bennett Willeford spoke on the 'History of the SVS from Its Beginning', and section Charter Member George Hazen offered remarks about his experiences as first secretary of the SVS. Attila Pavlath, Past-President of ACS, spoke

about the importance of local ACS sections serving as liaisons between the public and the chemical society, and presented Certificates of Appreciation to Past Susquehanna Valley Section Chairs.

Happy Anniversary, Susquehanna Valley Section ACS!

See more photos at: [http://course.wilkes.edu/SusquehannaValleyACS/stories/storyReader\\$117](http://course.wilkes.edu/SusquehannaValleyACS/stories/storyReader$117).



**Friends of Priestley House
Gift Shop Sale**
Saturday, December 13, 2008
10 AM – 3 PM
20% off your purchase

(Exception: Bradley Shoemaker prints of Joseph Priestley House not on sale)
FREE gift wrapping of your purchase
Refreshments
Give History for the Holidays!



Membership

The Friends of Joseph Priestley House extend a sincere “Thank you” to everyone who renewed their Friends membership for 2008. Members will receive a convenient 2009 renewal letter and form in the mail soon from Membership Secretary, Jack Holt.

Please welcome the following new members:

Carla Mulford, Bellefonte, PA
William Simpson, Lewisburg, PA
Karol Weaver, Mifflinburg, PA

About Friends membership: Memberships are for one year, renewable each January for the calendar year. New memberships are gratefully accepted at any time.

**FRIENDS OF
JOSEPH PRIESTLEY HOUSE**



472 Priestley Avenue
Northumberland, PA 17857

2008 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

*Please Note: With the exception of our ‘Twelfth Day’ winter holiday program on January 4, 2009, Joseph Priestley House will be closed from January 1 to March 8, 2009.

January 4	Twelfth Day at Priestley House	1:00 – 4:00 p.m.
March 8	Priestley House re-opens for the season	
March 8	Commonwealth Charter Day FREE admission!	1:00 – 4:00 p.m.
March 29	In Her Own Words Special women’s history guided tour	2:00 p.m.
April 18	Sparks & Pops for Curious Kids! Pre-registration required	2:00 p.m.
July	Summer History Camp dates TBA	9:30 a.m. – 12 Noon
September	Friends of JP House Annual Meeting date and time TBA	
November 1	Heritage Day at Priestley House	1:00p.m. – 4:00p.m.

Hours and programs subject to change. Admission is charged for all events excepted as noted above. For further information or to request a detailed calendar of events, please call (570) 473-9474 or visit our website www.josephpriestleyhouse.org



Administered by the

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

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