

Exeter house tour takes visitors back in time

Home tour benefits local historical society

By Nancy Rineman
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EXETER — Six of Exeter's historic homes were opened up to the public Saturday as part of the Exeter Historical Society's "Autumn in Historic Exeter" house tour.

The tour was held to benefit the society's educational programming, while affording visitors the opportunity to travel back in time by exploring houses of varied historical periods and architectural styles.

At the home of James and Sandra Tanis, at 21 Elliot St., visitors drifted through a home built in the mid-19th century for the Honorable John Kelly, who, in addition to practicing law, held many public offices and was editor of the Exeter News-Letter for more than 10 years.

Mary LaFreniere, a volunteer for the Exeter Historical Society, said she appreciated the fact that the Tanises haven't made changes to the house that would alter its historic status.

"They've kept the integrity of the house," LaFreniere said. "It hasn't lost its character. It has a nice New England feel."

Lin Roy, born and raised in Exeter, was enjoying the tour with her friend, Mel Bourgault, also an Exeter native. Both said they liked the fact that all the homes on the tour were of different styles and periods.

"These are houses I've been by all my life and never been in," Bourgault said. "It was neat to see how people have lovingly taken care of them."

The recommendation making its way around during the tour was that the house at 18 Green St. was a "must see."

"It was absolutely superb," Roy said. "She's kept it in period."



Owned by antique dealer Trisha McElroy since 1985, the 1750s post-and-beam home truly provided all with a return to the era, beginning with the pork roast cooking on the hearth, right beside it a hearth-baked apple/cherry pie. McElroy said she has researched the era and discovered where the house's "borning room" (birthing room) was off of the keeping room (main room of the house). The mantles painted black were indicative of the time surrounding Lincoln's death, McElroy said. Working on the home has turned up pottery pieces, a silver spoon and even Civil War buttons.

While the tour allowed people to see the first floors of homes, the **Inn by the Bandstand**, right in the center of town, was open top to bottom for all to see.

Innkeepers James and Victoria Lane bought the inn just two years ago and had been running it for the two years prior.

Built in 1809, the inn's many levels can accommodate 25 guests in rooms and suites. The Lanes say they want to keep the history of the inn alive by getting the community involved and will show visitors through at any time. The Inn by the Bandstand is being featured in Victoria Magazine's Christmas Issue, Victoria Lane said. It will also be part of Exeter's Festival of Trees night set for early in December.

Betsey Crespi, an Exeter Historical Society trustee, said the owners of the homes should be recognized for their willingness to be part of the day's event.

"The people are really nice, trying to support us," Crespi said.

Barbara Rimkunas, curator of the Exeter Historical Society, and Laura Gowing, program manager, were at the Historical Society museum Saturday morning, where a formal tea was held for participants. Tables laden with dainty finger sandwiches and assorted sweets were offered by ladies dressed in period dress, along with tea, coffee and cider.

"There's no way it would have happened without the donors," Rimkunas said, referring to the local florists who provided the floral arrangements for homes on the tour. Thanks were also given to the many local businesses whose advertising appeared in the tour's program and, of course, the many historical society volunteers who greeted visitors at the homes were the backbone of the tour, which society members hope will become a regular event.