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Celebrating the 'Colonel'
Pewee Valley plans exhibits and activities to mark book series

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The Courier-Journal

An army of roughly 70 volunteers is working to prepare Pewee Valley for a celebration of its history as captured in "The Little Colonel" book series.



The books, written by Annie Fellows Johnston starting in the 1890s, were loosely based on Pewee Valley residents, including a 5-year-old girl named Hattie Cochran, whose mannerisms echoed those of her grandfather, a former confederate colonel.

Suzanne Schimpeler posed at the entrance to The Locust, home of the Little Colonel in the books by Annie Fellows Johnston, in Pewee Valley.

The tales inspired Shirley Temple's role in the 1935 movie of the same name and were translated into more than 40 languages.



The historic Central Avenue home of Richard and Jana Greenwell will be on the tour.

Walking and driving tours through Pewee Valley, referred to as Lloydsborough in the classic tales, feature historic homes that now have new wooden markers. Other notable spots throughout town are listed in a tour book created for the upcoming event.

So many activities are planned that some people have worried that they won't be able to do it all, said Suzanne Schimpeler, a member of the Pewee Valley Historical Society. She has been helping plan the Feb. 9 event, which will feature an antique appraisal fair, a formal luncheon, a bus tour, a 30-minute play and tours of two historic homes -- Bemersyde and Tanglewood.

"It's multidimensional and complex," she said. "There are five things to do in a six- to seven-hour time frame. It's a lot to get done," she said.

But it is possible.

Schimpeler recommends attendees buy tickets in advance to guarantee a spot at one of the highlights of the event -- a luncheon by the Pewee Valley Presbyterian Church Women's Guild held at the Presbyterian Church. It will feature authentic recipes from the era of the Little Colonel, such as Jesse Joy's jelly cookies.

Schimpeler has been helping people make the most of the day. Here is what she recommends:

Begin at 10 a.m. with the antiques appraisal fair at St. James Episcopal Church.

Attend the women's club luncheon at 11:30 a.m. at the Presbyterian Church where siblings Sis Marker, Virginia Chaudoin and Bill Herdt will exhibit personal property given them by Annie Fellows. The Presbyterian Church also has a pew where Annie Fellows prayed.

Next, see the 2 p.m. showing of the play, "The Little Colonel of Lloydsborough," at The Little Colonel Playhouse.

Then visit one of two historic homes open that day.

Wrap up with the 4 p.m. bus tour (or a walking tour if all seats are taken).

"That's how I would do it," Schimpeler said.

Another way, she said, would be to start with the appraisal fair at 10 a.m., followed by the bus tour at 11 a.m., then do the 1 p.m. luncheon and see the play at 2 p.m., which leaves time to see both historic homes.

"It is definitely possible to get it all done; you just have to keep moving," she said.

However, if you don't have a reservation for the women's club luncheon, there will be an informal luncheon at St. James Episcopal Church that is sponsored by the church's women's guild and will feature a homemade triple potato Irish chowder.

Or come back on Sunday for the play and for a chili luncheon put on by the Pewee Valley Fire Department at Town Hall. Plus, the women's club will be open to visitors on Sunday.

(Feb. 9 is the only day to do the luncheon, attend the appraisal fair or see historic homes.)

Reservations should be made in advance for the luncheon. Tickets are \$25 and guarantee a seat on one of the bus tours and include the cost of the play and a tour map.

Detailed tour booklets will be available at the Pewee Valley Women's Club for \$5, and anyone without reservations must pay \$5 to see the play. Everything else is free.

Anyone can bring antiques to the appraisal fair. Turn-of-the-century items with ties to Oldham County or anything connected with The Little Colonel will be of particular interest.

Jana and Richard Greenwell, who live in the turn-of-the-century home known as Bemersyde, are looking forward to sharing its history with visitors. The couple joined the Pewee Valley Historical Society after moving to the area 2½ years ago.

"We're tickled to be doing just this little part" for the event, Jana Greenwell said. "When we moved here, we had no idea we were going to be so surrounded by history and so much fun."

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PEWEE VALLEY CELEBRATION

Tickets: They are available for events on Feb. 9 spotlighting Pewee Valley's "Little Colonel" legacy. The \$25 package includes a formal luncheon prepared by the Pewee Valley Presbyterian Church Women's Guild, a 30-minute play at The Little Colonel Playhouse, tours of two historic homes, a bus tour and an exhibit at the Presbyterian Church.

Reservations: Call the Oldham County Historical Society, 222-0826.

Related exhibits

Collectibles: At the Oldham County History Center in La Grange, an exhibit called "The Little Colonel: A Romantic Vision of Life Long Ago in Oldham County" runs through Feb. 16 and features "Little Colonel" collectibles and a recreation of Johnston's writing room.

Photos: The University of Louisville is exhibiting the works of Pewee Valley photographer Kate Matthews, whose bellows-style camera captured many of the people and places portrayed in "The Little Colonel" stories. Titled "A Kentucky Idyll: the work of Pewee Valley photographer Kate Matthews and author Annie Fellows Johnston," the exhibit will be in the photographic archives and rare books galleries in Ekstrom Library through Feb. 28.



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The Greenwells joined the Pewee Valley Historical Society after moving to the area 2½ years ago. (By Melissa Gagliardi, The Courier-Journal)



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A few of the Little Colonel books owned by Suzanne Schimpeler (By Michael Clevenger, The Courier-Journal)