

Saturday, August 12th Activities

A Walk Through Time at the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm Newbury, Mass

In 1971 cousins Agnes and Amelia Little deeded the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), retaining a life interest. After the last member of the Little family passed away in June of 1986, SPNEA acquired the 230-acre property, manor house complete with its contents of furniture, artifacts and Little family papers and the outbuildings.

When SPNEA began the process of stabilizing the manor house, an advisory committee of architectural historians, archaeologists, social historians, conservators, curators, educators and site staff was formed to oversee the full documentation of the property.

After intensive research and conservation, the information gathered was developed into a guided tour called *A Walk Through Time*. The tour explores the history of the property and its occupants through six successively earlier periods. In 1996, SPNEA began installing period room vignettes to enhance the understanding of the different periods.

Interpretive panels in each room graphically present the occupants of the property and the historical process. One panel entitled *Who Was Living Here?* identifies the owners, their families, servants, tenant farmers, slaves and day laborers at the property during the particular period of interpretation. A second panel entitled *How Do We Know?* presents the historian's process with each room addressing one aspect of the documentation that has informed the creation of the vignette.

The Little Family Dining Room, 1940-1986 (Photography)

To research and reconstruct the appearance of the Little Family Dining Room of 1986, SPNEA relied on inventory photographs and historic photographs. Taking inventory photographs that record the appearance of a newly acquired property is standard practice at SPNEA. The photograph that was taken at that time is just how the room is exhibited today. An historic photograph of the dining room that appeared in *The Architectural Heritage of the Merrimack* in 1941 reveals that the dining room barely changed between 1940 and 1986.

The Little Family Kitchen, 1900-1935 (Oral Histories)

Much of the reconstruction of the c. 1930 Little family vignette comes from reminiscences of family members, friends or employees who were familiar with the kitchen in the 1900s to the 1930s. On Christmas day in 1984 Amelia Little was interviewed by her great-nephew Geoffrey Lindsay. The tape-recorded interview helped SPNEA staff to transform a portion of the kitchen into how it possible looked seventy years ago. From the 1984 interview: "Apples, we always had apples in quantity. We ate apples every evening almost..." Produce from the farm played an important role in feeding the Little family. Preserving produce from the farm was a way of life for the family, not just an expression of the inherent frugality of the women, but a source of pride.