

SUMMER 2015 EXHIBIT

"The Camps of Kent: Making Summer Memories."

Open to the public Saturday June 13 through Sunday Sept. 28, 2015

Each docent will be asked to volunteer for three 2.5 hour shifts during
(June, July, August and September)

Thank you very much for volunteering to be a docent for Seven Hearths and the Kent Historical Society exhibit, "The Camps of Kent: Making Summer Memories."

The Mission of the Kent Historical Society, a donor-supported nonprofit organization, is to collect, preserve, interpret and present the rich history of Kent as well as to provide educational and research material to enrich the public understanding of Kent's artistic and cultural heritage.

The prized possession of the Kent Historical Society is Seven Hearths, a large pre-Revolutionary house. As the flagship of the Flanders National Historic District, and the only original building open to the public, Seven Hearths offers a unique view of the early development of the Town of Kent. For much of the twentieth century it was the home and studio of noted New York artist George Laurence Nelson.

Seven Hearths' history is Kent's history! Drawing on the extraordinary life of this house, Seven Hearths will be the primary vehicle to connect the people of Kent to their past. The Nelson studio and collection within Seven Hearths will inspire and enrich a larger community that will include the significant art and art history world beyond Kent. Through history and art programs, we will strengthen ties to the local area public and independent educational community, not only in our own region but other surrounding school districts as well. Seven Hearths will become a primary destination for New England tourists as well as a valuable research tool for serious artists and historians.

For those who have never served as a docent before, we have put together some information about what docents do and guidelines to help you learn how to become a great Seven Hearths docent.

The role of a docent, tour guide, or interpreter is an essential one. Acting as a bridge between visitors and the exhibition, the docent is the catalyst for learning in the museum. It is the docent who guides visitors on their journey of discovery, helping them blend what they already know with what they learn on the tour.

Docents rise to the daily challenge of engaging diverse and discriminating audiences in creative ways. They find themes that are relevant to visitors and provide them opportunities to tell their own stories. Docents stimulate visitors' curiosity, imagination, and individual expression by asking questions and encouraging the active participation of each tour group member. When docents actively engage visitors in looking at and talking about the house, collections, and exhibition, they will give them a deeper understanding. Through this personal relationship between visitor and docent, learning and appreciation of the exhibition, house and collection occurs. So, visitors continue to think about the issues raised in the exhibition and apply this new information to their everyday lives.

Sounds complicated, right? Not at all! But there are a few tricks of the trade that will help you become a terrific docent, who will provide enrichment and make the visitors' experience meaningful!

How to Become a Docent

The word docent comes from a Latin word that means to teach, and that is what docents do at museums around the country. Docents are specially trained volunteers who share their knowledge with a wide range of museum visitors on a regular basis.

Learn how to lead tours and how to change your tour for different groups of visitors. For example, think about how you would change your presentation for a 9 year old and then a 79 year old, or how would you keep people from touching objects.

Schedule time to volunteer at the Seven Hearths. You will be expected to commit to a certain number of hours per week or month. Your responsibilities could include leading tours, giving demonstrations, helping visitors with hands-on activities, or even community outreach programs.

Continue your education with any required docent readings or training. Because exhibits at Seven Hearths change yearly, classes for docents are recommended at the beginning of each season.

Things to Remember

The most effective tour will utilize both lecture-discussion and inquiry methods. When possible, hands-on or tactile objects can enrich any tour experience. Always start and end your tour in the kitchen

Introduction/Advance Organizer: welcome visitors and probe for their interests; give brief overview of house and Nelson Family; provide information on length and content of tour

Develop Theme: make a statement of purpose or objective for tour and develop methods to support that objective

Show Connections: use of transitions and linking of ideas between rooms during tour; compare/contrast of rooms or objects from room to room. In this exhibit, the rooms will be examining different aspects of the theme of camping. Children's camps, adult camps, social and alternative camps, etc

Ask Questions: use convergent and divergent questions to create and encourage dialogue

Conclusion: end with a summary statement to reinforce the tour objective; review some of the objects or ideas covered; thank visitors for coming; encourage them to visit gift shop; direct them information sources they may have inquired about, e.g. calendar of events, membership, etc.

Example: *As we've seen, Seven Hearths shifted from multi-purpose in which a whole family lived and worked to a division of public uses, and then back to private space. They all had important roles to play the life of Seven Hearth.*

Know Your Stuff

Nothing helps a tour go smoothly like thoroughly knowing the material you are presenting. The house, objects, images, paintings, and exhibition tell a story, so take the time to read information about Seven Hearths, and the exhibition script. Better yet, go through the house and exhibition and familiarize yourself with the information, history, and images you'll be sharing with your visitors. The more you know about the house and the exhibition, the more your confidence will grow. You are not, however, expected to be an expert, so don't feel like you have to provide a lecture. Be familiar enough with Seven Hearths and the Summer Camp theme so that you can ask good questions and shape a conversation. If you feel unprepared to answer a visitor's question, don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Before your visitors leave the museum, make every effort to find answers by consulting with museum staff and resources. Then perhaps, refer your visitors to their local libraries. Remember, unanswered questions can be a positive way to lead visitors toward further inquiry and research.

Know Your Audience

In general, most visitors to Seven Hearths are already interested in the history and impact of the center of the Flanders Historic District and they bring with them their own experiences and knowledge. They've come to the exhibition to learn more, to share their experiences, and to have fun. However, every visitor or group of visitors is different, so it's important to assess your audience before your tour begins. *This year, we may have a unusually high number of visitors who are coming just for the camp exhibit. Because they were isolated at their camps for the summers when they were here, they've probably never heard of Seven Hearths. But some may be fascinated with what they see, so this is a chance for us to gain some new fans for Seven Hearths.*

Priority #1 is to know your audience. Who are our visitors?

- Adults 45 and older – local and out of town
- Members of the Kent Historical Society
- Students – middle school, high school, and college
- Families
- International Visitors
- Senior Groups
- Decorative Arts students, scholars, or artists
- Special Event Guests
- First Time Visitors unfamiliar with building
- Visitors with Disabilities

Take a look at your tour group. Is it made up of young or older adults? Is it a school group of teens or youngsters? Do you have a local group of visitors? Do you have a small group of tourists from out of town? Are the people in the group interacting with each other? Are they strangers to one another? Ask a few questions to get to know your visitors: *What grade are you in?* or *Have you ever built or changed a house?* or *Are you from out of town?* or *Have you ever visited here before?* Knowing a little about your audience will help you structure and direct your tour.

You already know that a tour structured for first grade students is not going to be appropriate or interesting for teens or adults. Without even thinking about it, you'll adjust your tour length and content to the group. Your *Celebrating George Laurence Nelson - Painting A Picture of His Life*; his *New Life for Old Timber*; *Seven Hearths Tour Guide* and *Kent Historical Society website* provide a wealth of information on which you can base questions to ask your visitors. Some are more appropriate for student visitors; others are more appropriate for adults. It's up to you to decide which questions will be most effective with each tour group. After leading a few tours, you'll begin to see what works best with each group. Talk to your fellow docents and find out how they structure their tours for different audiences.

Why are they at the Seven Hearths?

- For a new experience
- Curiosity
- To learn about early America
- To learn about George Laurence Nelson
- See the exhibition
- To learn about house
- To see objects not normally accessible
- To share a social activity with friends, family, colleagues
- For contemplation and reflection

Know the Art of Asking Questions

Most questions do not require "yes" or "no" answers. They are designed to prompt memories, opinions, and new ideas that will lead to a conversation about the house or exhibition. Let your group's level of interest and participation be your guide. Work with the Curator to develop other questions that may be more directly related to your community.

"Interpretation is ... the bridge between the object and the observer." Once we discover the desires and expectations of our audience, we must decide how we as docents are going to effectively present the information to these visitors. As docents, we are the museum's most vital link to the public. We place the collections within a context, giving the objects meaning, and connecting the visitor to history. To play this role we can utilize several methods of interpretive techniques. As you begin to give tours you will recognize that the techniques can often be combined within a single tour, and that some techniques work better with certain groups and not as well with others.

Interpretive Techniques

Lecture – Discussion

In this format, the docent presents the information as a typical lecture. The most traditional type of interpretation, the lecture format provides the visitor with the basic knowledge of the collection, but does not necessarily encourage dialogue or exchange of information between the interpreter and the visitor. This is often the style of presentation that most adult visitors are used to; however combining it with some inquiry can often provide a more rewarding and education tour.

Inquiry - calls for visitors to visually assess room looking for specific objects that facilitate understanding of interpretation; encourages discussion and exchange of ideas among visitors and with interpreter; used often with children; questions can be open ended (divergent) or can be geared to elicit specific information (convergent)

There is a knack to asking questions, encouraging visitors to participate, and limiting discussion time. Here are a few hints:

To facilitate a conversation, docents are encouraged to lead observation and inquiry-based tours. So instead of reading from note cards, involve your visitors by asking them different types of questions. Try to elicit opinions, memories, ideas, and new questions. Here are some types of questions you can ask.

The inquiry method, though it may take more time and getting used to, can be the most rewarding method of interpretations as it encourages discussion and can create an animated exchange of ideas.

The inquiry method directs the visitors' attention to a specific object or room, encouraging active looking. We can help facilitate this activity by asking the audience questions about the object and the room that will stimulate further conversation. The questions can be a jumping point for discussion, such as, "*Now how does this room compare to the one we just saw?*" Or a method for revealing special information such as, "*Do you live in a colonial house? What does it look like? Was your house used for multiple purposes?*" For the summer of 2015, we can ask about the way their camps were set up, for example.

One of the keys to using the inquiry method is to use a variety of types of questions. **Convergent** questions ask visitors to do something with information they already have or can see. They involve finding similarities, differences, patterns, and/or relationships. Convergent questions ask visitors to categorize, to organize information or to find central theme. *What event is depicted here in the small living room or back parlor? Do you think the front parlor and back parlor serve the same function? Why or why not? or What room in your house would be called a parlor today*

Divergent questions ask visitors for new ideas or inferences; they are open-ended and designed to promote conversation. (no one right answer). To answer divergent questions, visitors must gather information from past experiences, link it to information being explored in the house, and create new understanding and interpretations.

For example: *What would you use the house for today? What business would you start in this house? How is your house arranged? Which areas are public, and which are private? Which room of your house do you spend most time in? Why? Do you like to paint? What is your favorite painting?*

The inquiry method empowers the visitor by allowing them to arrive at certain realizations themselves, with the aid of the docent. Using it can help visitors recognize how much they can gain from an object by simply examining it closely.

Self-Discovery: allows visitor to gather information on own without interpretation; best used in hands-on environment with children; adults sometimes enjoy this method with the aid of a self-guide or text labels

Evaluative questions ask visitors for judgments, choices or conclusions. Answers should not be casual opinions. To be valid, answers must come at the end of time spent considering the subject.

For example: *Do you equate owning property to happiness? Why or why not?* or *Do you think Laurence Nelson was happy when he painted? Why or why not?* *Did you attend camp? Why do you think there are less camps today? Would you have gone to a camp in Kent? Which one?* Please note that for the summer of 2015, the upstairs of Seven Hearths will be closed, and the Nelson artwork will not be on display. But we will have some information about him available for you to share with visitors who do come to learn about him.

You have probably asked and answered questions like this all your life. It's not important to memorize the names of these types of questions. You'll find that asking questions of all types will come naturally to you as you explore the house and exhibition. Try to use a combination of these types of questions on your tours to keep the discussion lively and interesting.

It's Worth the Wait

After asking a question, give your visitors some time to respond. Usually, someone will speak up in about ten seconds. This "wait time" may seem endless, but it's worth the wait. If, after ten seconds, your group remains silent, a little coaxing is in order. Rephrase the question or redirect it to an individual. If you still don't get an answer, try someone else. It is important to make sure not to put visitors on the spot with questions that they may not know the answers to. Do not ask a specific visitor to answer a question. Our visitors' comfort remains our number one priority.

If no one has a response, you may answer the question yourself and then ask, *Does anyone agree or disagree?* You very likely will get a response. Remember, when asking questions to individuals, make sure to vary your audience sampling. Try to pose your questions to visitors of various ages, genders, ethnicities, and cultures.

Inquiry can be especially successful with children – they are used to being asked questions and they love sharing their ideas with others.

Adults can sometimes be reluctant to offer answers or participate, especially if they are expecting a more lecture-oriented experience. Inquiry can still be used as a starting point for looking or discussion but can be sprinkled throughout the tour and supplemented with informative lecture by the docent.

Inquiry can be time consuming – visitors need time to absorb questions and craft responses. They also need time to actually examine the objects and the rooms. Remember-we've all looked at these things many times; for visitors, this is usually the first time they've seen our museum.

It's All About Timing

Your tour should take 45 minutes to an hour. This will give you some leeway in managing your tour. In some instances, the tour discussion may go on longer than it should. It may only include

a few of the visitors while the rest of the group becomes restless or bored. There may be another tour group waiting. No matter the reason, it is the docent's responsibility to limit the discussion, then guide the tour group to the next room. Use a comment like: *I'm sure we could talk about this subject for hours, but I do want you to enjoy the rest of the house and exhibition.*

Know Who's Boss

You may occasionally experience an unhappy, unruly, or disruptive visitor. If you have an unruly student on your tour, remain calm and focused. Encourage his/her participation in the discussion. If the problem persists, ask the teacher or adult chaperone to remove the student from the tour. You are not responsible for discipline; you are responsible for a great tour.

If you are dealing with an unhappy or disruptive adult, calmly explain that his/her comments are interfering with the other visitors' enjoyment of the tour and ask him/her to refrain from the behavior. Most museums and other exhibition venues have policies in place for dealing with disruptive visitors. Check the venue's policy and defer to it if you find yourself in a sticky or uncomfortable situation.

Know Your Own "Star Power"

In a way, docents are performers, so stage presence makes a difference. Here are some things to remember about performing your "starring role" as a docent:

- Follow the museum's guidelines for attire, name tags, etc.
- **Be confident!** If you believe you could be Hollywood's next big star, your visitors will too!
- Facial expressions are the primary way we assess each other's feelings, so **SMILE!** A friendly face will put visitors at ease and make them feel welcome. But don't let that smile get stuck on your face. You'll naturally respond to visitors' comments and questions and that lets visitors know that you're listening. Remember, a pleasant, smiling face tells visitors that you are having a good time. If you are enjoying yourself, they will too.
- **Make eye contact with your visitors.** Good eye contact will make visitors feel included in the discussion and will often encourage their participation. Make sure your eye contact is natural and relaxed. Don't try too hard or you may end up staring at visitors, which may intimidate them or, at least, make them feel uncomfortable. Good eye contact is a great feedback tool—you easily can assess whether you're keeping the interest of your audience.
- If you use hand gestures in your usual conversation, please do so on your tours. It's much better to **use natural hand gestures** than to shove your hands in your pockets and jingle your change, or twist your rings, or wring your hands. Be careful not to get too close to the exhibition. Remember, you serve as a model for appropriate museum behavior, so don't lean on the furniture or touch the objects.
- Be aware of your posture. Confident docents **stand up straight!** Try not to sway or shuffle back and forth while you're talking to your visitors. It's very difficult for visitors to focus on a moving object. It is likely that visitors will be scattered around you, so try to place yourself so that your back is not toward anyone for any length of time. Move around just enough so that you can see everyone's faces and they can see yours.
- **Be a good listener.** When a visitor raises or answers a question, focus on the visitor, make eye contact, and respond appropriately. If the rest of the tour has not heard the question or comment,

repeat it for the entire group to hear.

- Your voice can be used to create a lively and exciting presentation. **Vary the tone and volume of your voice**; use it to show emotion or to emphasize a point. Try not to sound “canned” like a television commercial or a telemarketing representative, but natural and engaging.

Speak clearly; try to enunciate or articulate your words precisely. Try a few tongue twisters before your tour to get your mouth, lips, and tongue loosened up and working together. You’ll lose your audience’s interest in no time if they can’t understand you.

- **Make sure you can be heard.** Think of “projecting” rather than speaking loudly. Shouting uses only your voice and it strains it as well. Support your conversation with lungs full of air. Let your diaphragm push out or “project” your words on a stream of air. Think of a musician squeezing a bagpipe with his/her elbow, forcing air into the pipes. Good projection is based on that same principle. If you are getting a crowd of blank stares, ask your audience if they can hear you. If not, you’ll have to project a little better!

- Limit the use of “um,” “you know,” and “like” from your vocabulary ... or at least try to. These pause fillers disrupt the flow of your tour. They may also make you seem nervous or unprepared. **Be aware of these pause fillers and try to avoid them.** There is nothing wrong with a few seconds of silence while you find the right word or collect your thoughts.

Know How to Practice

Once you’ve explored *Seven Hearths*, and thought about the themes of the house and exhibition, it’s time to start practicing for your tour. Practice introducing yourself and welcoming your visitors. Then, walk through the house and exhibition again and see what objects and images catch your eye. What aspects of the exhibition most interest you? The ideas and thoughts you have will guide you in developing your tour.

Another good way to practice is to ask questions. Start a conversation at the dinner table, in the office, or at a local gathering place. Ask your family and friends a few questions like: *What kinds of houses were in the community where you grew up?* or *What feelings do you associate with camp?* Really listen to their responses. This practice will prepare you for the conversations you will have with visitors to the exhibition.

After leading a few tours, meet with other docents and share your experiences. Find out how they answered an unexpected or challenging question. Share with them how you structured your tour to a mixed group of older adults and their grandchildren. Take tours led by fellow docents; you’ll be surprised at what you can learn from other docents.

Know You Can Do It!

There is a great deal of information here about becoming a terrific docent, but it is not as challenging as you might think. The most important thing to remember is to relax and enjoy your tour. Most docents feel relaxed when they have a good grasp of the information in the exhibition, so explore *Seven Hearths* then read and practice. Be sure to use your new “great docent” skills as you lead tours through any of *Seven Hearths’* rooms or displays and exhibitions at the museum.

Theme Tour Ideas

Women’s Duties and Home Life

Men’s Duties and Home Life

Seven Hearths – Changes Through the Years

Occupations: Domestic, store, fur trading, boarding house, painter, teacher, tenant farmer

Colonial & Early America

Dining and Entertaining

Influence of Other Cultures

Dining/Entertaining

Again, for the summer of 2015, the central theme is the summer camp experience and the impact it had on thousands of campers in Kent.

How to ... Address a Multigeneration Group

- Find a common ground by finding out the groups interest
- Relate tour to modern life whenever possible
- Help children see connections between past and present by showing familiar objects
- Ask open ended questions whenever possible
- Listen to responses fully from both children and adults before responding
- Try to read the groups body language to gauge if they are interested or not

How to... Manage a Multigenerational Group

- Make eye contact and address each participant – this sets the tone of the group and establishes that you are in charge
- Let them know what to expect (e.g., will stop in touch area, no playing but may get to see a few objects up close, may come back after the tour is over, group should stick together, etc.)
- Shorten length of tour – maybe 30 minutes instead of 45 instead
- Allow children to explore period rooms and ask questions
- Again pay attention to verbal and nonverbal cues to determine tenor of group, interest, and what is needed

Visitors With Disabilities Tour Tips

- Do conduct tour the same as you would for any visitor
- Do ask if they need assistance
- Do not provide assistance without permission
- Do not be afraid to use terms like see, blind, deaf, walk, etc.
- Do face visitors when speaking to ensure you are heard and your lip movement is seen
- Do speak clearly and moderate rate of speech
- Do speak directly to the visitor even if they are using an interpreter
- Do be aware of tour time and access to 2nd floor is not handicap accessible.

Dealing with Sensitive Issues

- Do not get defensive verbally or nonverbally
- Acknowledge incident, information, or history
- Redirect by talking about learning/growth from incident
- State facts only keeping personal opinions to yourself
- Do not linger on topic; address it and move on with the tour