



TIMES LEADER

JUNE 10 - JUNE 16, 2005

the Guide



- Page 3

LIVING IN STYLE



WHAT'S DUE
ON STAGE

- PAGE 5



'BRANGELINA'
DEBUTS IN 'MR.
& MRS. SMITH'

- PAGE 13

GRAND TOURS



Jesse Teitelbaum, executive director of the Luzerne County Historical Society, talks about a fancy fireplace at the Kirby House, which is now part of Wilkes University. The structure is one of five mansions you can tour Saturday and Sunday afternoon.

W-B mansions reflect the glories of a gilded past

By MARY THERESA BIEBEL
mbiebel@leader.net

Inhale, exhale. One last deep gulp of air. Then you'll probably have to hold your breath while your maid laces you — ouch — into your corset. Suitably fashionable in your slim gown, you'll be ready to summon a carriage and call on wealthy friends who live in Wilkes-Barre's finest homes.

OK, OK, don't panic. No one is planning to encase your ribcage in whalebones this weekend. But if you take part in the "Historic Mansions of Wilkes-Barre Tour," sponsored tomorrow and Sunday by the Luzerne County Historical Society, you'll probably find yourself imagining what your own life might have been like if you'd been born 100 years earlier.

Would you have been one of the city's prominent businessmen, retiring to the drawing room of the Kirby House after dinner for brandy and cigars? Or would you have been the servant responsible for dusting the beer steins carved into the woodwork of the Stegmaier House?

Maybe you would have been a child of privilege, playing hide-and-seek among the wooden angels whose heads support the armrests of two high-backed chairs in a great hall. Or maybe you would have been a teenager who toiled in a mine or silk mill most of the week, then enjoyed a cool breeze on the River Common on your day off.

Perhaps you would have been an architect who created some of the impressive homes that still grace South River and South Franklin streets. "What will it be?" you might have asked the socially prominent family looking for a new home.

"French Chateausque?"
"High Victorian Gothic?"
"Colonial Revival?"

See TOURS, Page 4



TIMES LEADER STAFF PHOTOS/AIMEE DILGER

Fans of chandeliers and sweeping staircases will be delighted with this part of Weckesser House.

◆ IF YOU GO

What: "Historic Mansions of Wilkes-Barre Tour."

Who: Sponsored by the Luzerne County Historical Society.

When: 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Where: Start at Luzerne County Historical Society Museum, 69 S. Franklin St., Wilkes-Barre.

Admission: \$10 for adults; \$5 for children

More info: 823-6244.

COVER STORY



TIMES LEADER STAFF PHOTOS/AIMEE DILGER

This room is the kind of setting where a lady of leisure might have graciously entertained her guests.

TOURS

Continued from page 3

All those styles are represented on this weekend's tours, which historical society director Jesse Teitelbaum sees as a way to highlight one of Wilkes-Barre's greatest assets — its history.

"Wilkes-Barre was an extremely important, booming town — not just to Pennsylvania, but to the rest of the country," Teitelbaum said. "It's important to know what the city was before you can bring it back."

Fans of history and architecture will find many clues to Wilkes-Barre's Victorian past on the upcoming tours, which begin at the Historical Society Museum, to the rear of the Osterhout Library in the first block of South Franklin Street.

Come to the museum first, Teitelbaum stressed, and you can pick up a map to the other five houses, all of them built in an area bordered by West South, West Market, South Franklin and South River streets.

Then you're welcome to proceed at



Look closely and you might see a cornucopia of nature's bounty in this elaborately carved handrail.

your own pace to the Stegmaier House, Weckesser House, Kirby House, Conyngham House and McClintock House, taking a break whenever you wish.

McClintock House, now a dormitory for Wilkes University, is the oldest structure on the tour. It was designed in 1840. The other houses date to 1872, 1897,

1911 and 1916.

Guides will be on duty from 1 to 5 p.m. each day to explain the intricacies of old-time elevators, chandeliers and pocket doors, as well as the advantages of such devices as a garage turntable. "It turned the car around, so you never had to back it out," Teitelbaum said.

The director will shepherd visitors

through the museum exhibit, where they'll see rooms set up to represent "Homes of the Wyoming Valley" as they might have appeared during the Victorian Era.

"When you think of the Victorian Era, you think 'elaborate' in terms of clothing and furniture," Teitelbaum said. "But we wanted to show everyday items, too."

Here you'll see not only the delicate furniture and fine china that would have looked pretty in a parlor but also a sturdy wooden washing machine with a hand-cranked agitator and an iron you would have heated on a pot-bellied stove before you pressed your clothes.

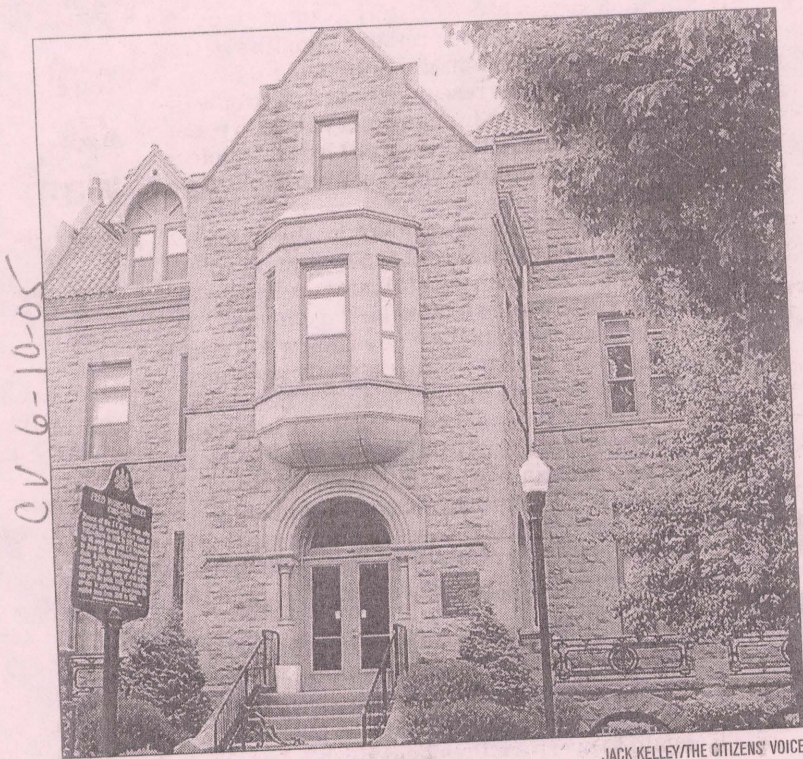
A tiny wire case called a "soap saver" proves the thrift of earlier generations; it allowed people to use the last sliver of a cake of soap rather than let it slip away.

You'll also find an old-time manicure set, hand-stitched quilts, a gentleman's suit and a pair of bloomers.

Oh, yes, there's even a dark burgundy gown, circa 1890, adorned with buttons and frills and a teensy waist.

"That's just a fantastic dress," Teitelbaum said.

But think of the heavy-duty undergarments you might have needed first.



Tour one of
Wilkes-Barre's
historic
mansions this
weekend,
above, or stop
by the West
Pittston pool to
beat the heat.



Llewellyn & McKane
Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

BOOKNOTES

Take a look at unique architecture in area

W-B T.L. 8-24-00

The city of Wilkes-Barre has its share of unique architectural buildings, one of which is the Osterhout Free Library at 71 S. Franklin Street.

The building in which the library is housed was originally the First Presbyterian Church of Wilkes-Barre.

When the congregation decided to construct a new church, the old one was sold to the trustees of Isaac Osterhout's estate. The library was opened in 1889. It is notable for the beauty of its stained-glass windows, and for the oak carvings found in the reading room.

Located at 92 S. River Street is Catlin Hall, one of the two Wilkes University buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Catlin Hall is named after the painter George Catlin, who was born in Wilkes-Barre in 1796. Catlin became famous throughout the world for his works of American Indian Tribes, a collection so complete and detailed that it has never been equaled.

The other Wilkes building listed in the National Register is

McClintock Hall, donated to the University by Attorney Gilbert S. McClintock. The hall is in the Greek revival style, with later Victorian additions.

The Wyoming Historical and Geological Society is now headquartered in the former Maxwell Residence at 49 S. Franklin Street.

This was the home of Volney Maxwell, attorney, and was constructed in the 1870s.

The Sterling Hotel was opened in 1898. At that time it was known as the Algonquin, and it quickly became one of the showpieces of the Wyoming Valley. An orchestra played every noon and evening. Sumptuous meals were served there and many prominent people were guests at the hotel. But as the years passed, the building fell on hard times until it eventually was declared unfit for human habitation.

The Forty Foil Meeting House, located on Wyoming Avenue, was constructed in 1807. It is the oldest church edifice in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Originally designated Union

Chapel, it was built to fill the combined needs of two sects: the Congregationalists/Presbyterians and the Methodists.

It served as a house of worship until 1837, when both groups began building separate churches of their own; but it is still in use today for community events.

The two most famous historical homes in the region are the Swetland Homestead, built by Luke Swetland in 1797; and Denison House, constructed by Col. Nathan Denison in 1790. Both offer special events and programs that provide a glimpse into the past.

These are just a sampling of the many interesting historical sites found in the Wyoming Valley. There are many more, some of which have occasionally been opened to the public.

For more information, the Osterhout Free Library has an extensive collection of local history.

TLC Book Club coming soon

Coming soon is the Times Leader Community Book Club,

sponsored by Tudor Books, the Times Leader, and Luzerne County Library System. Popular authors will moderate a book discussion group in the area.

First among them is Jodi Picoult, who will appear at 7 p.m. Sept. 7 at Wyoming Seminary in Kingston.

Her book, "The Pact" is available at the Osterhout.

Also, in conjunction with this, the Osterhout is offering a book discussion from 7 to 8 p.m. Aug. 29. Anyone interested is welcome to come to the library and join in.

Other events will be planned for upcoming meetings with additional authors, such as Paul Watkins, author of "Archangel"; Pat Cunningham Devoto, who wrote "My Last Days as Roy Rogers"; and William Kowalski, who penned "Eddie's Bastard."

To acquire a copy of these or many other books, please stop in at the library.

This column is written by staff members of the Osterhout Free Library. To contact them, call 823-0156.

Copy of Original

