

# Florissante, The Mansion, Holds Christmas Open House



Lyon family descendants at the open house of Florissante, The Mansion, from left: Jimmy Ortiz, Sandy King, and Stuart deCamp.

By Betty Haig

LYONS FALLS - The historic Florissante, The Mansion, opened its doors for holiday tours for the first time on Saturday and Sunday the first three weekends in December 2019, with free admission.

Lyons Falls, originally known as High Falls, became known as Lyon (later Lyons) Falls in honor of the Caleb Lyon family. Caleb Lyon, acting as land agent for John Greig, his wife Maria Dupont and six children, arrived here in 1819 (their youngest child, Caleb Jr., was born in 1822). He built his home, mills, and a bridge across the Moose River, and founded the settlement called Lyonsdale. Caleb was instrumental in attracting many settlers to the area and purchased 10,000-plus acres for himself. He died on September 15, 1835, in the woods near Lyons Falls. A memorial plaque was placed near the spot he died, and it can be seen today from the River Road. He was buried on an island at Lyonsdale and a large monument was

erected. Caleb Jr., however, had his father's body secretly removed and interred in Greenwood Cemetery in New York City. Caleb Jr. became a well-known national figure and in 1864 President Lincoln appointed him Governor of Idaho.

In 1839, Caleb Sr.'s oldest son, Lyman Rasselas, married Mary Brinsmade Northrup and built a large clapboard house just north of Lyons Falls. By 1862, he had built a splendid stone mansion and maintained a large dairy farm, building the renown "Big Barn." Lyman and Mary had three daughters: Mary Lyon Fisher, Julia Lyon deCamp, and Florence Lyon Merriam. Lyman was active in public affairs, one of the largest landowners in the State, owned the waterpower of the High Falls, and worked diligently for the construction of the Black River Canal. He died in 1869 in Georgia, where he had gone for his health. In 1876, his daughter Florence Isabella married Charles Collins Merriam and they lived in the Lyon Mansion until it burned in 1886. Florence



Chris Panik of Constableville enjoying the decorated porch at Florissante.

then had a new home constructed, which she named "Florissante," which remains in use today as an occasional bed and breakfast, and is known as "The Mansion." The home has been known more recently as "Ski Lodge" and/or The Mansion.

Caleb Sr.'s eldest child, Laura Eliza, married Francis Seger, who was also a landowner of a lot of land and an active participant in public affairs. About 1830, they built their home overlooking the falls and named it "The Pines." This lovely home is still occupied today as a private residence. The Pines and The Mansion are connected by a wooden walkway. This was built on the orders of Florence Lyon Merriam and Mary Lyon Fisher, so the sisters could visit each other's homes more easily. Considering the influence the Lyon family had on the development of

the area, it seemed appropriate that the name High Falls was changed to Lyons Falls.

A couple of years ago, Lena Yancey, who owned and operated "The Mansion" for over two years, decided it was time to turn over this beautiful property to the next caretaker. Yancey was one of almost 10 different owners since the direct descendants of the Lyon family sold it in the 1960s.

As of December 2017, the new caretaker, of direct Lyon decent, took possession and occupancy. After some TLC and a few system upgrades, the new caretaker, Stuart deCamp, the great-great-grandson of Lyman R. Lyon and great-great-grandnephew of Florence Lyon Merriam, announced his plans for "Florissante" The Mansion, and thus began a new chapter in its history. Julia Lyon deCamp is the great-grandmother of Stuart deCamp. It

now serves as deCamp's residence and he operates it as a bed and breakfast.

The Christmas open house was a delight to many who made the tour through each and every beautifully decorated and impressive room. Many members of the Lyon family were on hand to meet and greet everyone, answer questions, and even consented to have their picture taken by/or with many. If you missed the tour this year, hopefully you'll have a chance next year if it's offered again. It is really a Christmas treasure, a memory maker.



Kenny and Carol Kulpa of Boonville with Stuart deCamp in the foyer of Florissante, The Mansion.

(Photos by Betty Haig)