

Living History at Historical Trades Event

Text and Photos by Cheryl Wooten



HOLLY SHAFFER.



ISABELLA BURGO.



SOLOMON BURGO.

On August 19th across the Porter County Courthouse lawn, residents were treated to a living history exhibit from the Porter County Museum. Eighteenth century period reenactors portrayed a variety of historical trades at this one-day event.



Isabella Burgo and Holly Shaffer demonstrated two different ways of spinning carded wool from sheep and alpaca into yarn and thread. Holly utilized a drop spindle, one of the oldest methods for spinning fibers into yarn or thread, dating back thousands of years to primitive times. The rotation of the spindle twists the fibers, and the yarn is wound around the spindle. Using a foot treadle to power her wheel, Isabella hand-feeds strands of wool into her vintage spinning wheel to make yarn. In colonial times, women would spin wool, hemp, flax, cotton and occasionally silk which would then be used to produce homemade cloth. Although synthetic fibers and technology have replaced home-spinning, thankfully, there are people like Isabella and Holly who are keeping this textile art alive.

Solomon Burgo of LaPorte not only looks the part of a blacksmith from days gone by, but also has the skills and tools of the trade. With his portable furnace, Solomon turns the hand crank which forces air into the unit to increase the temperature. Using an anvil and hammer, he shapes the end of a long bar of iron into a pointed tip. The blacksmith was one of the most essential tradesmen of any colonial town for items made of metal. They made tools and implements such as hammers, nails, axes, shovels, plows and more. They also crafted household items including sewing needles, pots, pans, and fire grates.

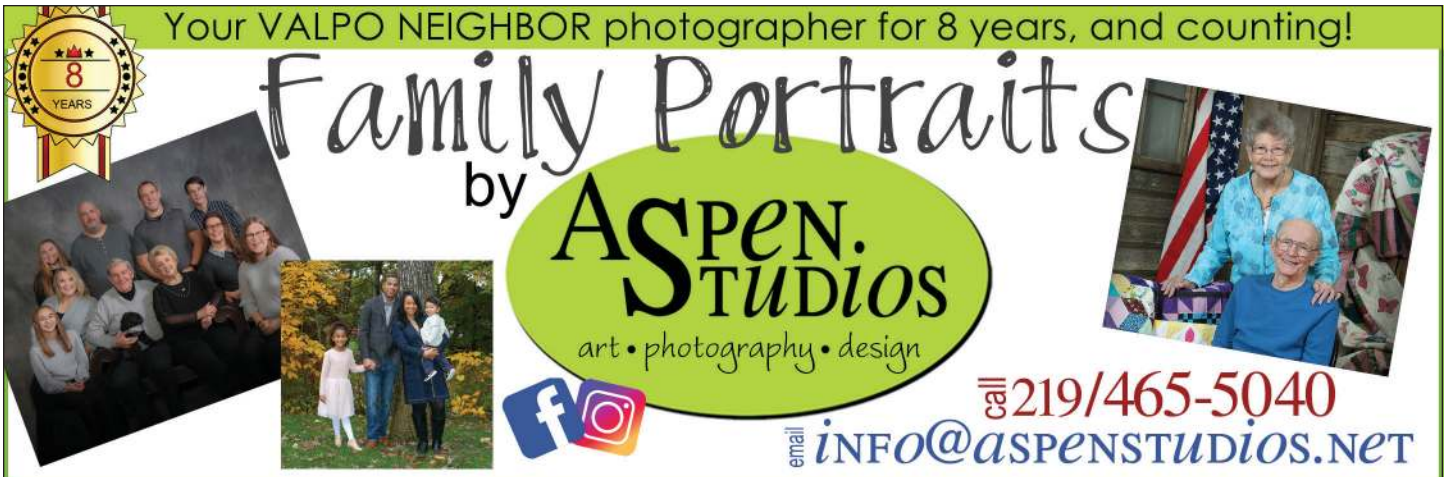
In the 18th century, the voluntary night watchman's job was akin to a security guard. His role was to monitor the safety and security of a town. Carrying his lantern and staff, he would help a drunk get home safely, get noisy people to quiet down, and shoo away stray dogs. But his most important task was to patrol the streets, watching for smoke or flames. In the colonial era, most buildings

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DAKO MORFEY.



ELIZABETH SLUCAS.



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JOHN CARDINAL.

were constructed of wood and each one usually had a fireplace, so fires did occur with some regularity. If he did spot a fire, the night watchman would swing his rattle which created a very loud and distinct sound and alert the community to action to help put out the fire. Dako Morfey of Michigan City portrayed the night watchman.

Elizabeth Slucas of South Bend showcased her skill as a narrow-band weaver. Using a small, table-top loom, her practiced hands guide the shuttle of weft thread through the lengthwise warp threads. The narrow ribbon or bands were an important item in colonial America, used as belts and to tie up clothing such as hosiery, pockets and aprons. They were also used as ties for grain and feed bags, candle wicks, and strapping for chair seats. Elizabeth enjoys the art of narrow-band weaver as a stress reliever.

Another important craft in colonial times was the making of shirts and buttons. Kristen Smanski of Elgin, Illinois patiently wraps thread around a metal ring to create buttons used on shirts. These tiny functional items were a true necessity in everyone's lives.

Demonstrating the craft of woodworking, John Cardinal of Lansing, Michigan uses a bark spud (aka: peeling iron or peeling spud) to remove bark from a log. Bark naturally keeps

moisture in the wood, so removing it allowed the wood to dry out and prevent cracking and splitting. Colonial carpenters, cabinetmakers, coopers, wheelwrights, and shipbuilders all used the various implements displayed.

Last, but certainly not least, is tavern keeper Ian Baker of Michigan City who also organized the event. Ian explained that taverns of the time were more of a restaurant and community gathering place as opposed to just a bar. On display were the various alcoholic ephemera used for measuring out beer and hard liquor. Gaming was also part of the tavern scene. Dice games such as shut the box and hazard or chuck-a-luck, allowed patrons a chance to try their luck.



IAN BAKER.

For more information on Porter County Museum exhibits and events, visit them at 20 Indiana Avenue, Valparaiso or online at www.pocomuse.org.

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