



DECEMBER 2024

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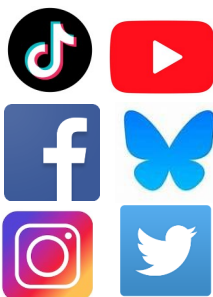
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A Newsletter for the volunteers & friends of the Stephenson House



We're Accepting Auction Items

The museum is currently collecting donations for the spring online antique and collectible auction. Need to clear out some stuff from the attic, basement, garage or storage unit? Well, we're happy to pick it up or you can drop it by the museum during regular business hours. The committee is looking for small to large size antique and collectibles. If you unsure whether an item is appropriate, contact the site via email or phone. Modern items cannot be accepted.

Please note, we are no longer accepting 50/50 donations. All items donated are 100% to the museum. The Stephenson House is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization and all donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.



'Friends' Annual Meeting Notice

Our annual membership meeting of the Friends of Col. Benjamin Stephenson House will take place on January 28, 2025, at 7 pm via Zoom.

This meeting is open to all current members of the 'Friends'. Any member wanting to attend this annual meeting should contact the director to request a link.

From the Garden: Tobacco at the Stephenson House

By Ron Stellhorn



As stated in an early history of Madison County, IL “Farmers grew their own food: corn, oats, wheat, potatoes, melons, and vegetables. They transformed some of their corn crop to whiskey at the many distilleries across the county, while they smoked the tobacco they grew for themselves.” The U.S. Census of 1850 indicates that tobacco was a minor crop in the county, with just 100 pounds grown annually. By contrast 1.1 million bushels of corn were then being grown each year.

We have been growing a small amount of tobacco at the Stephenson House each year since about 2014. Contrary to popular belief, tobacco is not just a crop of the southern U.S.,

but will grow anywhere in the country.

Tobacco seed is almost microscopic and is too small to plant directly in the soil. Historically, tobacco seed was planted in a seed bed in early spring. When the seedlings reached 6 inches in height, they were set in the field. We have always started our seed indoors in flats under florescent light. The seeds are placed on top of the soil and need light and moisture to germinate.

Once the seedlings are established in the field, or in our case one of our raised beds, they grow rapidly with little care. Generally, a plant reaches maturity in 3-4 months. The two biggest enemies the plants have to deal with are aphids and tobacco hornworms (actually big caterpillars.) A heavy rain will usually take care of the aphids, while the tobacco worms are picked off and destroyed.

Tobacco is harvested by one of two methods: (1) the entire stalk is cut and hung to dry or (2) the leaves are removed at intervals as they mature and are allowed to dry. In the early 19th century, tobacco was generally smoked in pipes or cigars and used as snuff.



Christmas at Stephenson House

By RoxAnn Raisner



Photo taken by Brent Furrow of the house during the Christmas Candlelight Tours on November 30, 2024.

We do not know how the Stephenson family celebrated Christmas or if they celebrated the holiday at all. Unfortunately, no extant family records have been found to tell us what customs the family may have observed. It is very possible the Stephenson's viewed Christmas day as any other day of the year with no special meal, gift giving or merry making. Since there are no diaries or hand-written family records with specific notations, we are forced to look at the bigger picture to piece together a possible scenario based on known facts.

In America during the early 1800s, Christmas was not the major national or commercial holiday it is today. The significance of the holiday was influenced by an individual's cultural, religious and social background. The fourth of July was by far the more universally celebrated holiday across the nation. The local Edwardsville newspaper, *The Spectator*, provides some insight into local and national attitudes toward the two holidays. Editions of the paper printed around July 4 usually refer to numerous celebrations in Edwardsville, surrounding towns and across the nation; mentioning parades, gatherings, toasts, and general merriment. On the other hand, references to

Christmas in the paper during 1819 and 1820 are limited to two; one is a poem and the other a remembrance of a 'northern' Christmas by the author. Compared to the Fourth of July, the importance of Christmas appears to be minor.

Christmas was celebrated in American but not all religions embraced the holiday. The Stephensons were active members in the Edwardsville Presbyterian church, which was established in 1819. In early America, members of the Presbyterian faith tended to shun any observances of Christmas in an effort to separate their faith from the practices of the feast and saint days celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church. Other denominations that excluded Christmas celebrations included Puritans, Mennonite, Amish, Baptists, Methodist, Quakers, and Congregationalists. Changes in Presbyterian attitude regarding Christmas celebrations slowly began to take place in the 19th century but the majority of church members continued to follow earlier doctrine well into the 20th century. It is not known whether the Stephenson's view on Christmas was open to a simple holiday celebration or if they adhered to the stricter doctrine.

An interesting reference to Christmas was written on December 25, 1819 then printed in *The Spectator* on January 1, 1820. The poem was entitled "The Christmas Gift" and the author is credited by a single initial, 'L'. The overall feeling expressed in the poem is similar to the modern saying "Keep Christ in Christmas".

THE CHRISTMAS GIFT.

Addressed to a Lady, in answer to the usual salutation--"I wish you a Merry Christmas."

Promptly, with smiling face, you send "A merry Christmas" to your friend.

Thank you, dear Fanny, from my heart.

Your friendly smiles a joy impart,

A sweet, refreshing, balmy rest,

To my poor, lonely, sorrowing breast.

But yet, me thinks unseemly mirth

Ill celebrates a Savior's birth!
 How do the sports of field or hall
 Our thoughts to our Redeemer call!
 How do we show our thankful joys
 By splendid mummary and toys?
 O! ill befits it; this event
 To celebrate in merriment!

"But sure," some say, "the Savior's birth
 "Bought joy and peace upon the earth,
 "Saved from their sins a guilty race,
 "And pour'd supply of richest grace:
 "Shall not the subject of His love
 "Rejoice while Time and Nature move?
 " - Forbid, that we should e'er forget
 "This glorious day with joy to greet!"

Well, be it so—let every voice
 And heart in Christendom, rejoice.
 But let us hear how he ordains
 We pour our pious, thankful strains

Is it by mingling with a crowd
 Of triflers—thoughtless, vain, and proud,
 By whirling through the mazy dance,
 Or by the foaming sleigh-horse prance?
 Is it by light and airy songs

Of jocund hearts and licen'd tongues?
 Shall we, in fine, by Satan's arts,
 Banish religion from our hearts,
 And say we give an offering meet
 Of thanks for benefits to great?

"Is any merry," saith Saint James,
 "Let him express his joy in psalms."

Then let us lift our souls in praise,
 To Him our noblest anthems raise,
 Who condescended to be born:
 O! let us hail the glorious morn
 With solemn joy and awful mirth,
 And thus commemorate His birth!

And O! my interesting friend,
 Our lives and powers let us spend
 In glad thanksgiving to His name
 Who was a babe in Bethlehem:
 Our ardent prayers let us lift For the
 GREAT GLORIOUS

L.
 December 25, 1819.

Most visitors to the museum in December expect to see the stereotypical Colonial Williamsburg Christmas decorations; elaborate fruit wreaths hanging on and above doors, garlands topped with pineapples, and elaborate displays of greenery adorning every possible surface inside and out. These decorations are beautiful, to be sure, but not historical. Back in the 1930s, when Colonial Williamsburg was just developing as a historic site, these lovely decorations were an ingenious marketing tool designed to draw visitors during the holidays; and it worked. Unfortunately, it worked so well that visitors believed our ancestors used precious, expensive and often times hard to get fruits to decorate their homes for the holidays.

Christmas had become 'big business' in the early part of the 1900s and this type of faux history offered a way to cash in on tourism. Fruit would not have been used to decorate a home in early America, it would have been eaten. Fruits that were hard to come by, especially in winter, would not have been put into an elaborate decoration to freeze, rot, or be eaten by animals....what a waste!

The Christmas customs & decorations displayed at the site are historical. They are general representations of those practiced in American when the Stephenson family lived in Edwardsville. These customs may not have been practiced by the family, or their servants, but they were familiar with them. Our decorations are simple and based on extant Christmas illustrations and writings by travelers visiting America in the early 1800s. We are not depicting known traditions celebrated by Ben, Lucy or their family members but American customs in general.



Sprigs of holly placed in the window panes was commonly depicted in historical images. These are in the parlor at the museum..

Greetings from the President

Happy Holidays!!!

And Thank You! Thank You for a year of supporting the 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House and being a part of preserving and sharing history. Sharing, teaching history is a golden gift that one will always have. It allows one to evaluate the present and prepare for the future. So, know you are giving a great gift all year long.



Speaking of gifts!...remember you can give the gift of a membership as a fun stocking stuffer that will last all year long. This is in addition to the many items in our gift shop...like one of our many cookbooks that demonstrate how cooking was done in the Colonial/Federal/Regency era or a wooden hand fan that has a lovely woody scent.

Enjoy your holiday! And remember as you sit by your fire, that during the 1800's this is how everyone in the Stephenson House kept warm on a cold winter's night. And in 2025, the House will be filled with not just warmth but more learning, fun and love that you will be part of again.

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!

"If you wou'd have Guests merry with your Cheer / Be so yourself or so at least appear," Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanac

This is Truly Yours,
Lady Blue

From the Hearth: Speculaas

These spiced cookies originated in Belgium and the Netherlands during the middle ages and are often eaten around St. Nicholas Day (December 6) but have become a holiday tradition in many countries. Wooden molds are used to create the detail associated with these cookies. We hope this inspires you to start a new family tradition.

Our favorite recipe (with more history, photos and details) can be found on the Seafarer Baking Company's website <https://www.seafarerbaking.com/p/the-a.html>

Preparing the Dough

Dry ingredients:

- 1/4 teaspoon white pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon coriander
- 1 1/2 teaspoons grated nutmeg
- 2 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 3 cups all purpose flour

Wet ingredients:

- 1 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 1/2 sticks unsalted butter at room temperature
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 1 egg

Step One - Mix the dry ingredients thoroughly in a bowl and set aside.

Step Two - Cream the wet ingredients with a mixer at medium speed until well mixed, about 2 minutes.

Step Three - Slowly add the dry ingredients, mixing at a low speed, until all the ingredients have been incorporated.

Step Four - Remove the dough from the bowl, fold it on itself a few times and form the dough into a brick about 1/2 inch thick, wrap in plastic and chill in the refrigerator overnight.

Forming the Cookies

Start by chilling the mold in the refrigerator for an hour or two.

Make sure you are using a properly seasoned mold. It should have received several coats of food grade mineral oil for the



initial seasoning.

Begin by generously brushing flour into the dry mold cavity.

Rap the flour out of the mold, rotating the sides, so there is a thin layer of flour over the entire surface of the mold.

Take the dough brick out of the refrigerator, cut off a portion big enough to fill the cavity plus a little extra. Be sure to put the rest of the brick back into the refrigerator. Quickly roll the dough with a pin until it is approximately the size of the cavity and slightly thicker than the deepest depth of the mold.

Brush the dough surface with a light coating of flour.

Using a dough scraper or a knife, lift the dough off the work surface.

Place the dough onto the mold cavity.

Press the dough into the cavity, shoving into the edges and then using a vigorous pressing motion with the palms over the entire surface.

There should be an excess of dough all around. Start by trimming the edges of the design.

Then level the top. The surface of the dough should stand slightly above the top surface of the wood.

The next step is essential, push the edges of the cookie away from the mold. This greatly assists in the release of the cookie from the mold.

Place a sheet of parchment, cut larger than the design, on the cookie and press it into the cookie surface. The parchment acts to stabilize the design as it leaves the mold.

Several sharp raps are required to get the cookie to start to release. Hold the mold vertically while rapping and keep the parchment up against the cookie.

After placing cookies on baking sheets, still adhered to the parchment, put the pans back in the refrigerator for a half hour.

Preheat the oven to 335 degrees. Set the racks to the upper and middle areas of the oven. Bake for 10 minutes, then rotate the pan 180 degrees and bake another 10 minutes until lightly browned around the edges. Smaller cookies will require less time. Place the cookies on a wire rack. When they've cooled a few minutes, slide the cookies off the parchment paper and continue to cool on the racks.

Store the finished cookies in an airtight container.

Upcoming Events, Tours & Activities

- **December 15**, Last Day of 2024 Season
- **December 16—January 3**, House Closed
- **January—February 2025**, Winter Hours, Museum open Saturdays (10am—3 pm) & Sundays (12-3 pm) only
- **January 11, 2025**, Girls Scout “Playing the Past”, 9 am–12 pm, 8-12 girl scouts
- **February 26, 2025**, Lifelong Learning Institute (SIUE) tour, 10:30 am, 25+/- adults



Stephanie Malench (left) of the Collinsville Daily News presents Stephenson House site director, RoxAnn Raisner (right) with a check for \$60. Stephenson House was the winner of the first Collinsville Daily News Winner Takes All Philanthropy Day Fundraising Competition.



Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

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|----------------------------------|---|----|--|----|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 Last Day of 2024 Season | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 Christmas  | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | 30  | | | | | |



Want to support Stephenson House
when you shop online?

PayPal Giving Fund

Set us as your favorite charity, then click to
donate \$1 each time you check out with
@PayPal. It's easy:
paypal.com/us/fundraiser/charity/1651866

**IT'S AN EASY WAY TO LEND YOUR
SUPPORT!**



News & Needs

Needs...

- If you have borrowed house clothing, books or patterns, please return them to the site by **December 15** for the **annual inventory**.
- Do you need service hours? We can help! There are a variety of jobs and projects we'd love to have help with.
- Please return Volunteer Training binders if you have one.
- Aprons and day caps for the interpretive wardrobe
- volunteers to help with house tours, gift shop, garden & grounds, grant writing & research, special event, as well as seamstresses to sew clothing for the volunteer wardrobe



The house was aglow with candlelight during the Christmas Candlelight Tours on November 30. The gentlemen played whist in the master bedroom while the ladies sang carols with guests in the parlor.



November Happenings at the House



(Top Left) Our Christmas Candlelight decorating crew. (Above) The Sewing Saturday volunteers worked on making new caps and neckerchiefs for the wardrobe. (Top Right, Right, Bottom Right) The Candlelight Tours: Henry Evans plays the pianoforte in the parlor. Muriel Jones talks to visitors in the cabin. Sarah & Jane Frerichs make gingerbread in the kitchen. The Schnare sisters provided music for dancing in the dining room.. (Bottom Left) The St. Louis Shape Note Singers hosted a sing at the museum. (Left) Richard Murphy tunes the 1820 pianoforte in preparation for the Christmas Candlelight tours. (Left) Amy Mullane works on holiday decorations for the dining room.



Be Our Friend...

*Renew your membership or become a new Friend.
Fill out and mail the following information to us.*

YES! I want to help. Enclosed is my contribution:

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State & ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____ Membership Level: _____

Please send me information about volunteering at Stephenson House.

Checks should be made payable to the:

Friends of the Col. Benjamin Stephenson House

Payments may also be made in our online store:

www.stephensonhouse.org

***Memberships are from January to December.** Benefits of membership are extended to an individual and his/her immediate family. We accept cash, check or credit card donations. Memberships are extended for monetary donations only. The Friends of Col. Benjamin Stephenson House is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization FIN 37-1395804



Send your membership to the
**Friends of the Col. Benjamin
Stephenson House**
P.O. Box 754
Edwardsville, IL 62025



Membership Levels

Henry's Friend (child, K-12)
\$10

Friend of Ben & Lucy
\$25

Stephenson Family Friend
\$50

Landmark Friend
\$100

Heritage Friend
\$250

Living History Friend
\$500

Founding Friend
\$1,000 or more

**Corporate membership information
available upon request.**

Our Board of Directors & Staff

Muriel Jones, *President*

RoxAnn Raisner, *Site Director*

Peggy Emling, *Vice President*

Phil Stack, *Bookkeeper*

Doug Piper, *Treasurer*

Rachel Harris, *Secretary*

Paul Brazier

Elizabeth Edwards

Sean Goding

Rachel Hill

Stacey Lipe

Andrea Miracle

Kathleen Schmidt

Jason Stacey

Jaclyn Wallace

Leslie Wood



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