



The President James K. Polk State Historic Site

# The Young Hickory News

Winter 2011

Volume 12, Issue 3

## President James K. Polk Birthday Celebration

by Courtney Rounds

On Saturday November 5, 2011, the President James K. Polk State Historic Site celebrated the 216th birthday of James K. Polk. The birthday celebration has been held annually for more than 10 years and has become a favorite among visitors. This year's program was our most successful event in years. Over the course of the day, more than 500 people joined us to celebrate and learn more about the life of James K. Polk. The program featured living history vignettes highlighting aspects of life in Mecklenburg County during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when James K. Polk was a child and lived here on the farm with his family.

Costumed interpreters were on hand to bring this period to life! Visitors met with members of the Catawba Valley Cooking Guild in the kitchen to learn about open-hearth cooking. They also visited demonstrators featuring spinning, weaving, and woodworking. Children were able to paint white wash on a miniature cabin and play with period toys and games. Visitors learned about the history of gold in North Carolina and got to try their hand at panning thanks to the staff of Reed Gold Mine State Historic Site who joined us for the day. Members of the bluegrass band the Flat Possum Hoppers came out and provided some wonderful music.

The site also celebrated the opening of our newest exhibit *Rounders to Baseball*. This exhibit traces the history of baseball from its origins as an English game called Rounders through the first professional game played during President Polk's administration and the impact the game has had on North Carolina and the Charlotte area. Dr. Christopher Rounds of Allen University gave a presentation on the history of the Negro Leagues in the Carolinas.



Bob Remsburg shows visitors how to pan for gold.

What birthday is complete without cake? The Waldhorn German restaurant generously donated German chocolate and lemon cake for visitors to enjoy.

The site staff would like to thank all of the volunteers who helped in making this one of our most successful events in years. We truly could not have done it without you.



Bill McGinn gives a woodworking demonstration.

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## From The Manager's Desk



President  
James K. Polk  
S.H.S. Staff

Site Manager II  
Scott Warren

Interpreter II  
Courtney Rounds

Maintenance  
Mechanic II  
Robert Dreher

Staff Interpreters  
Sarah Allen  
Jamie Torres

Site Hours  
Tuesday-Saturday  
9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Closed Sunday &  
Monday and Saturday,  
December 24

**State Holidays**  
**December 26&27**  
**January 2**  
**January 16**

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*Sharon VanKuren, President  
Mark Dappert, Vice President  
Ben Pelton, Treasurer  
Sheila Osaka, Secretary  
Tabitha Carnes,  
Volunteer Proofreader*

Hello everyone! Welcome to another edition of *The Young Hickory News*. After a string of recent events and reflecting back on this past year, I realize that I have a lot to be thankful for in 2011.

In January, I attended the **Jekyll Island Management Institute (JIMI)** hosted by the **Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC)**. JIMI is an intense eight-day museum leadership training that gives participants a chance to engage with and learn from some of the leaders in the museum field. It was such a rewarding experience to learn from the best.

In March, I was awarded the **2011 North Carolina Museums Council (NCMC) Mid-Career Professional Service Award**. The NCMC Conference is such a great way to learn from other museums in the state and share common challenges and discover new solutions for the problems that we all face in the museum field.

Lastly, I had the great honor to present a session at the annual Southeastern Museums Conference in Greenville, SC in October. The presentation, "The Little Museum That Could," addressed how small museums have fared in this challenging economy and their strategies for getting ahead. We have a tendency to think that we are alone in facing these challenges, yet there are others that face it with us.

I also could not have done all of this without the grateful support of **Sharon Van Kuren** and the Executive Committee of the Polk Memorial Support Group, who provided not only the resources to carry out projects here at the site and at these conferences, but also the moral encouragement when our site's very existence was threatened by the budget axe this past summer. Another special

group that consistently rises up to help the site in its continuing effort to grow and prosper is the dedicated and loyal group of volunteers. We have a wonderful group of volunteer docents who do everything from running the cash register and helping with the craft areas during special events to guiding the CMS third graders on their field trips. This hard-working group is the life blood of the site and without them, our lives would be very difficult. Thank you volunteers!

Lastly, we look forward to the events and happenings surrounding the Democratic National Convention (DNC) when it arrives in Charlotte in September 2012. This will be an opportunity for Charlotte to place itself in the American history books by playing a role in the democratic process. What a great way to cement that by showcasing the birthplace of Mecklenburg County's ONLY United States President, our 11<sup>th</sup> President James K. Polk. I tell students and adults alike that we are so fortunate to have a United States President from Pineville and Mecklenburg County.

I hope you will enjoy your time with family and friends during this special time of year. I wish the best for you and your family and I look forward to seeing you here at the site. My door is always open. Keep History Alive!

All the best,  
Scott

***P.S. I hope that you will join or renew your membership. It goes a long way!***



Site Manager Scott Warren

## Christmas in the Backcountry December 10

by Courtney Rounds

On Saturday, December 10 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., the President James K. Polk State Historic Site will host A *Backcountry Christmas Celebration*. This living history event will show visitors how the Christmas holiday was celebrated in Mecklenburg County in the year 1801. Each building will be decorated in 19<sup>th</sup> century style. Costumed interpreters will teach visitors about the different holiday customs of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



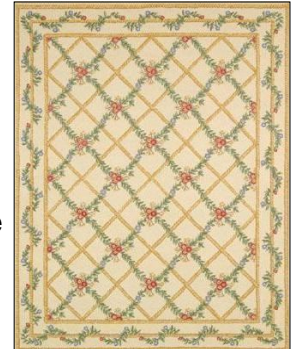
*19th century Christmas decorations*

In the main house, visitors will learn about the different customs and traditions that would have been celebrated in the Polk household. The kitchen will be converted into a lively tavern, a place where gossip, news and holiday cheer was in abundance. Outside, visitors will see holiday revelers by an open fire. There will also be toys, games, and crafts for children. Join us for the afternoon and see what the holidays were like over 200 years ago! For more information about this event, contact [courtney.rounds@ncdcr.gov](mailto:courtney.rounds@ncdcr.gov).

## Floor Cloth Workshop February 18

by Courtney Rounds

The earliest floor cloths, called oil cloths, trace back to 14th century France, where they were used as wall hangings and table covers. Floor cloths became popular in England as floor coverings and were considered elegant. They were imported from Europe to America as early as the late 17th century. George Washington listed one in his financial disclosure report in 1796. By the mid 18th century, American floor cloths' quality compared favorably with those made in Europe. As floor cloths became more affordable they increased in popularity.



*Example of a 19th century style floor cloth.*

Learn more about these decorative pieces on February 18 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Volunteer **Erica Blake** will teach you how to make floor cloths that you can take home with you. You'll learn how to apply traditional floor cloth techniques to create your own bookmarks and mouse pads. Pre-registration is required and there is a \$10 materials fee. Registration ends on February 8, 2012. The workshop is limited to 10 participants. We will provide light refreshments, and attendees are welcome to bring lunch. For more information contact [polk@ncdcr.gov](mailto:polk@ncdcr.gov).

## White House Christmas Trees

President Benjamin Harrison was the first president to have a indoor White House Christmas tree. It stood in the upstairs oval room, branches adorned with lit candles. First Lady Caroline Harrison, an artist, helped decorate the tree. As our nation's hostess, she set the stage for what would eventually become a much beloved holiday tradition.

Not all White House families after the Harrisons set up interior Christmas trees. It was First Lady Lou Henry Hoover who started the as-yet-unbroken custom. In 1929, she oversaw the decoration of the first "official" tree. Since that time, the honor of trimming the principle White House Christmas tree has belonged to our first ladies.

In 1961, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy began the tradition of selecting a theme for the official White House Christmas tree. She decorated a tree placed in the oval Blue Room with ornamental toys, birds and angels modeled after Pyotr Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Suite" ballet. For more information, visit <http://www.whha.org>

## Christmas Traditions of the 19th Century

*By Jaime Torres and Katie Summa*

Christmas today means waking up at the crack of dawn to a beautifully decorated tree surrounded by gifts. During the 1800s however, it meant something quite different. Young James K. Polk would not have had stockings full of sweets or listened to stories about the North Pole or Santa Claus.



*Illustration from Robert Chambers  
"The Book of Days" 1869.*

Rather for James and his family, Christmas was an opportunity to spend time together. Children were given small gifts of fruit or candies but they spent most of Christmas day at church followed by a large feast. This winter holiday was a time of respite from the rigors of farm life. Families attended parties and balls to catch up with neighbors.

People decorated their homes in the backcountry, but in minimal style. Instead of Christmas trees, bands of garland were hung about windows and doorways. It wasn't until the 19th century that the first Christmas trees were introduced in America by German immigrants.

December 17 marked the English custom of the twelve days of Christmas. This period is known as Yuletide or Twelve Days of Celebrations. Families burned a Yule log to start the Christmas festivities. The burning of this log, which was adorned with holly, was to symbolize the beginning of a new year.

Yuletide ended with "Twelfth Night," more commonly known as the Feast of the Epiphany, on January 6. The Twelfth night marked the last day of feasting after which families would take down their decorations and prepare for the new year.

## Jackie Robinson

*by Courtney Rounds*

On November 5, in conjunction with the exhibit *Rounders to Baseball*, the site welcomed **Dr. Christopher Rounds** from Allen University, who gave a short talk on the history and importance of baseball's Negro Leagues.

Speaking about Jackie Robinson, who in 1947 integrated Major League Baseball, Dr. Rounds made a case that the experience of Robinson and other athletes showed how African-Americans used athletics not only as means to win acceptance for themselves, but to achieve progress for their race. In this way the stars of the Negro Leagues often proved to be more than mere athletes; they became informal Civil Rights pioneers. Not only did the Negro Leagues constitute a form of entertainment for African-American communities across the country, but the players themselves became role models. Their games invigorated communities large and small, offering temporary respite from a society that denied them equality.

After integration, Robinson and other African-American athletes changed the look of American sports, and by playing the game the way they always had, became agents for social change. For Robinson, the road to freedom was a long one, but for others who long deferred, relief never came. The presentation was about them, the hundreds of gifted African-American athletes, who played in baseball's Negro Leagues, never having receiving the opportunity to have their talent appreciated as truly equal individuals.

## A Farewell and a Welcome Back

*by Courtney Rounds*

There have been some staff changes here at the Polk site this fall. We are sad to say goodbye to Staff Interpreter **Frank Cone**. Frank, who joined the staff in 2009, is a graduate of East Carolina University with a degree in American history. Frank left in October to pursue other career opportunities but continues to volunteer at the site. He hopes to one day join the National Park Service and says that his time at the President James K. Polk Site gave him some great experience to further his pursuit of this goal. We will miss Frank's willingness to lend a hand and his love of ECU football. Best of luck Frank!

We get to welcome back **Sarah Allen**, who will begin as Staff Interpreter in mid-December. Sarah is no stranger to the site. She spent her summer with us as a collections intern. For her internship, she spent time compiling a thorough inventory of the site's collections and worked on creating a furnishing plan for the historic buildings. Sarah is a senior at The University of North Carolina Charlotte and graduates this December with a bachelors degree. We are so excited to have Sarah back here and know she is going to be a great addition!



*Frank Cone (front) and staff and volunteers*



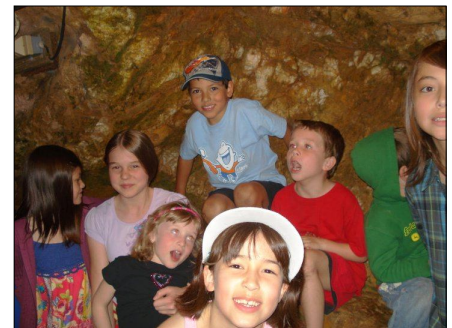
*Sarah Allen with her husband Christopher*

## Tar Heel Junior Historians Update

*by Courtney Rounds*

The Young Hickory Chapter of the Tar Heel Junior Historians has begun its second year and we have been very busy. The Tar Heel Junior Historian Association encourages the study of state and local history by North Carolina's young people. Our chapter began in 2010 and comprises more than 15 home school children ages 5-15 from around the Charlotte area. The club meets once a month and engages in a variety of hands-on educational activities. Club members have learned about 19th century photography, pottery, woodworking, open hearth cooking, and have taken a field trip to Reed Gold Mine. Club members also complete a book report, keep a journal and work on a project such as creating a diorama. The Tar Heel Junior Historians also volunteer at the site by helping at special events and cleaning around the site.

This year the club is planning on attending the Tar Heel Junior Historian Convention in Raleigh in April. This convention is a time for clubs all around the state to meet and share ideas. We are excited to attend this year. We are always adding new members and looking for volunteer demonstrators. For more information, please contact [courtney.rounds@ncdcr.gov](mailto:courtney.rounds@ncdcr.gov).



*The Young Hickory Chapter on tour at Reed Gold Mine*

## Volunteer Spotlight: Marilyn Clayton

*by Courtney Rounds*

One of our most dedicated volunteers, **Marilyn Clayton**, joined the Polk site in February of 2008. Marilyn spends the majority of her volunteer time working with school groups during field trip visits, but she can be seen pitching in during special events and on the weekends. Born in Cabarrus County, Marilyn has lived in Mecklenburg County for more than 40 years. She is a graduate of Queens University, where she obtained a bachelors of arts in history and retired from Duke Energy after 25 years of service.

Marilyn made the decision to volunteer at the site because she, "wanted to share her love of history with others." She is always willing to lend a hand and has spent hours on additional projects for the site. This summer, Marilyn made pockets, haversacks and mob caps for all of the summer camp attendees and she recently completed her own period dress.



*Marilyn Clayton in the Visitors Center*

In 2011, Marilyn and her husband Robert celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. She enjoys reading, cooking, needlework and travel. This fall she and Robert took a cruise to the Bahamas and they are already planning another cruise to Alaska.

Thanks to Marilyn for all that you do!

## Welcome New Board Member Sheila Osaka

*by Courtney Rounds*

We have another new addition to the Polk family with board member **Sheila Osaka**. Sheila began her relationship with the Polk site in 2010 when her children **Nikko** and **Maya** joined the Young Hickory Chapter of the Tar Heel Junior Historians. Over the past year the Osaka family have come very familiar faces around the site, volunteering for special events, participating in camps, and even coming in on Saturdays to help give tours. The Osaka family is always willing to lend a hand no matter the task. The Polk Memorial Support Group Board took notice of Sheila's devotion and asked her to join the board as secretary, and we were all so excited when she agreed.



*The Osakas at Disney World*

Sheila and her husband Yashi spend quite a bit of time traveling with their son Nikko and daughter Maya. This past summer, they spent a few weeks in Scandinavia and they frequently visit family in Japan. The Osaka family have followed the Laura Ingles Highway in Minnesota, and even spent a few nights in a Conestoga Wagon. Sheila, Maya and Nikko have a deep love of history and want to share with others. Both of the children love to dress in period costume and help teach visitors about period toys and games. Maya is a historic interpreter in the making: She even had her birthday party here!

Sheila has instilled true enthusiasm for learning into her children and we know that she will bring her dedication and passion to the Support Group Board. We welcome Sheila and thank her for all of her hard work.


## Special Events for 2011 and 2012

**December 10: Christmas with the Polks.** Visitors will see a living history vignette in the main house. Each building will be decorated in the 19th century style. Come and learn about food and customs from Christmas in 1802! 11 a.m.–3 p.m., **FREE** admission.


**February 18: Historic Floor Cloth Workshop.** Join volunteer Erica Blake as she leads this fascinating hands-on workshop on period floor cloths. Visitors will apply traditional floor cloth techniques to create their own bookmarks and mouse pads. **Pre-registration is required.** Please register by February 8, 2012. The workshop is limited to 10 participants. 10 a.m.-4 p.m., **Fee: \$10** includes light refreshments, so feel free to bring a lunch.

**Coming in March: Mexican American War Encampment.** This program illustrates the life of a common citizen who has been called into service due to the 1846 conflict with Mexico. Visitors will see period costumed interpreters demonstrating military drills and practices, camp life and even rifle firing. Check our website for the date and time.


**For more information on these or other programs, please call the President James K. Polk State Historic Site at 704-889-7145 or visit us at [www.polk.nchistoricsites.org](http://www.polk.nchistoricsites.org).**



**online**  
[www.polk.nchistoricsites.org](http://www.polk.nchistoricsites.org)



**Facebook**  
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**Polk Support Fund, Inc.  
Application for Membership**

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Please check membership category:

[ ] Congressman (\$20/year)      [ ] Governor (\$25/year)      [ ] Speaker of the House (\$40/year)

[ ] President (\$100/year)      [ ] Lifetime Member (\$1,795)      [ ] Memorial/Honor Gift      Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Honoree \_\_\_\_\_

**The President James K. Polk  
State Historic Site**

12031 Lancaster Highway  
Post Office Box 475  
Pineville, NC 28134

Phone: 704-889-7145  
polk@ncdcr.gov

**Volunteers Wanted!**

We are currently recruiting volunteers of all ages, backgrounds, and talents who can share their time with us. Even a few hours a week or a month can make a difference.

If you are interested in learning more about the 11th President and helping your community please contact [courtney.rounds@ncdcr.gov](mailto:courtney.rounds@ncdcr.gov).



The holiday shopping season is here! [ShopforMuseums.com](http://ShopforMuseums.com) is brimming with the best deals for all of the people on your list. Visit them online and save money at stores like Kohls, Target, Best Buy, and more!

There are no extra steps and no added costs. Just go to [www.shopformuseums.com](http://www.shopformuseums.com), choose [President James K. Polk State Historic Site](http://www.shopformuseums.com) and start shopping!  
There are more than 400 retailers partnered with the site.