

Happy Holidays



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Holiday Tours At Historic Area Home

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By Annabeth Miller, SMT Editor

NEW MADRID – The holidays as celebrated in the 1860s in Southeast Missouri will come alive this weekend in New Madrid.

Christmas tours at the Hunter-Dawson Historic Site will be featured Friday and Saturday, Dec. 9 and 10.

The Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site preserves a now-vanished part of Missouri: The stately Bootheel mansion. Filled with original pieces and furnished in the style it was in during its heydays of the 1860s-1880s, the ornate mansion provides a history lesson in every corner. In fact, most of the original furnishing purchased by the home's first owners, Amanda and William Hunter, are still in the house.

Because of its location on a bend in the Mississippi River, New Madrid was a thriving river port prior to the Civil War. New Madrid residents, William and Amanda Hunter, were very successful in the mercantile business having a large drygoods store - the Crystal Palace - in town as well as a floating store used to peddle goods to other towns along the river. They also bought large quantities of land, eventually holding 15,000 acres in four states.

The Hunters planned their house, which was built of yellow cypress probably processed at a sawmill they owned. It exhibits Georgian, Greek Revival and Italianate architectural features - popular styles during the antebellum period - and took nearly a year to construct, being finished in May of 1860.

William died of yellow fever in April 1859 before the house was finished, but Amanda and her seven children moved into the house during 1860-61. After her husband's death, Amanda, her sons, and her brother continued to run the family's enterprises, which included the store, a gristmill and a lumber mill.

Through the extension of personal credit to many people in the area, the community of New Madrid retained some semblance of solvency during the Civil War. Missouri was a divided state during the war, but the town was distinctly Southern in its character. One of the Hunter boys served in the Confederate forces.

During the Battle of Island No. 10 and the Siege of New Madrid, the Hunter property was occupied by Union troops preparing to besiege the town. To date, no written documentation has been found to show a direct involvement of the house in these actions. However, Amanda's grandson, Bud, related that the house had been used as the headquarters of Gen. John Pope after the occupation of the city by Union forces. Despite the danger and excitement the war brought, the Hunter family and their home survived the conflict relatively unscathed.

On Christmas Eve, 1874, the Hunter's youngest daughter, Ella, married William Dawson. Upon Amanda's death in 1876, the house was left to the Dawsons, who lived there until their deaths. While in residence, William served three terms in the Missouri State Legislature, and in 1884 was elected to the United States House of Representatives. He also served on the planning committee for the 1898 World's Fair Exposition in Chicago.

Descendents of the Hunter family occupied the house continually until 1958.

Regular tours will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. . Special holiday candlelight tours of the home will be conducted from 6 to 8:30 p.m. This event is free and open to the public.

The house, aglow with oil lamps and candles, will be decorated with fresh greenery, Christmas trees and 1860s-style ornaments. Site staff will wear Victorian-era fashions as they lead the tours through the house. Refreshments will be served.

Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site is located on Dawson Road in New Madrid.

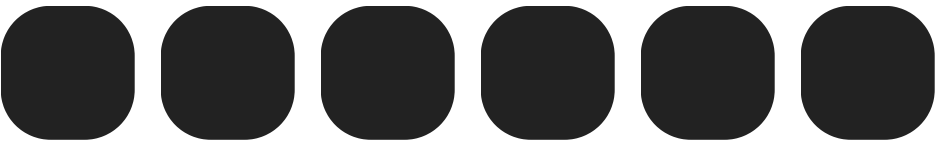
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