



The VAN BUREN CHRONICLES

Newsletter of the Friends of Lindenwald Summer 1993

MR AND MRS ROBERT RUBIN LOAN VAN BUREN'S DINING TABLE TO LINDENWALD

England. Corresponding Roman numerals on the underframing and on the table leaves reveal the proper placement of the leaves. In addition, a Federal mahogany drop-leaf table,



It seemed impossible that a table which is 15 feet when fully opened and 20 feet long when the extension is attached is a mere 25 inches when completely closed.

On Tuesday July 13, 1993, the staff of Martin Van Buren National Historic Site were all gathered at the front door. A red van had just arrived carrying the premier piece of Van Buren's Lindenwald, the dining table. The process of unloading it and placing it in the front hall, the area especially designed to hold it, was about to begin.

The first thought of everyone was how this wonderful 20 foot table that they had spoken of and visualized in their minds so many times could come in such a small vehicle. A special mechanism, unusual in American furnishings, made this possible; it was based on the 1800 patent of Richard Gillow of London and Lancaster,

which extends the table to greater length, is believed to have been made at a later date and designed to exactly fit the D-shaped hinged leaf of the original table. (cont'd, page 3.)



While originally referred to as the "telescopic principal for extending tables," today "accordion action" is used to describe a hinged diamond-shaped underframing that supports the table top.

PHYLLIS EWING IS APPOINTED CURATOR AT LINDENWALD

On June 28, Phyllis Ewing joined the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site staff. During college, her Park Service career began as a seasonal Park Ranger at Valley Forge National Historical Park. Upon graduation she began work in the Curatorial Division.

Raised in Iowa, trips to many national parks with her parents inspired her interest. Mrs. Ewing tells us that, "At Mesa Verde National Park, my first cultural park, I decided I wanted to become a Park Ranger. Having operated a business for almost 25 years I still desired to work for the National Park Service. Knowing a college education was necessary, I attended Rosemont College and graduated in 1989, magna cum laude with an AB in American Studies and Art History."

Prior to arriving at "Lindenwald" and being able to share the excitement regarding the loan of the Van Buren table, exhibiting the (cont'd, page 2.)

Washington's Valley Forge Letter had been the highlight in her career. The letter, written to the President of Congress on December 23, 1777, just four days after the arrival of the army to Valley Forge. It is the park's most important document and tells in great part the story of why Valley Forge is a national historical park. Washington wrote,

... unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place in that line this army must inevitably be reduced to one or other of these three things. -- Starve--dissolve--or disburse

As the park had never displayed a historical document, a new case had to be designed and built with light environment, security, and accessibility considerations. Also, because the document had been folded for over two hundred years, special support had to be constructed for it. Since the letter was part of a major gift to the park, a special unveiling and reception was held as part of the December 19, 1991, commemoration of the army's march into Valley Forge. As planned because of its delicate condition, the letter was returned to the vault three weeks later. But in those three short weeks thousands of people saw the thought and signature of

I have the Honor to be / Sir /
Your Most Obedt Servt,
G Washington

Mrs. Ewing adds "I'm enjoying living in Kinderhook, everyone has made me feel welcome. Also I'm looking forward to learning the wonderful Lindenwald collection and experiencing the new challenges of Martin Van Buren National Historic Site."

In turn the Friends welcome Phyllis and are grateful to her for the fine article about Van Buren's dining table that is in this issue.

NEW OFFICERS ELECTED FOR FRIENDS OF LINDENWALD

Ruth Piwonka, Kinderhook, was

elected president of the Friends of Lindenwald at the Annual meeting of the Trustees. She succeeds John Scheriff of Niverville who served the organization for six years. Other officers elected were Vice President William Spampinato, Hudson; Secretary Helen McLean, Kinderhook; and Treasurer Allen J. Thomas, Kinderhook. Their term of office is two years.

PARK SERVICE TO HOST PROGRAM FOR THE FRIENDS' TENTH ANNIVERSARY

On Sunday, September 19, the staff of Martin Van Buren National Historic Site will provide a special program for the membership of the Friends in recognition of the 10th anniversary of the organization.

Friends will have the opportunity to see parts of Lindenwald that are not open to the visiting public.

Be sure to watch your mail for your invitation. It will provide all the exciting details.

"AMERICA'S BEST" HONORED BY NORTH ATLANTIC REGION

In May, four staff members from the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site were recognized as "America's Best." Superintendent Bruce Stewart nominated Marion Berntson, Supervisory Park Ranger; Judy Harris, Cultural Resources; Judie McCallum, Administrative Technician; and Richard Roller, Maintenance Mechanic for the honors.

North Atlantic Regional Director Marie Rust initiated this program, which is now being adopted by other regions. The North Atlantic Region of the National Park Service covers New England, New York, and part of the New Jersey. Forty-six Park Service staff from the region gathered in

Springfield, Massachusetts, for a one-day program. They represented all the various functions that are conducted at the region's parks--interpretation, administration, law enforcement, cultural resources, maintenance, and information management. It was noted that present in the room was 558 years of NPS experience.

Speakers included Tom Thomas, retired after 36 years with the NPS. He served at several western parks and was Superintendent of the Mather Employee Development Center. He spoke of the National Parks past and of his pleasure in knowing Horace Albright, one of the pioneers of the Park Service. Speaker Russ Dickensen, who served in the NPS for 39 years, including five years as Director (1980-1985) noted there are 368 sites in the NPS with two thirds of them cultural or historical. Historic sites attract 59 percent of the yearly NPS visitors and there are currently 163 Friends groups within the park system. Gary Machlis, professor at the Cooperative Park Studies Unit, a research station of the NPS also spoke. Gary has conducted sociological studies in over fifty national parks. Using demographic maps of the country, he was able to show where ethnic growth was happening, the changes in the elderly and youth population and the need for future urban parks in crowded areas yet to be. The most frequent requests of visitors to the National Parks are: a brochure with directions to the park; once in the park, a good map of the park (this would apply to larger scenic parks); and clean, well-lighted rest-rooms. Walking for pleasure was the number one reason visitors come to the parks. Gary's wealth of knowledge and his energetic presentation was enjoyed by all. Others who spoke were: Robert Reynolds, who has served as Superintendent at six sites and is now at Acadia National Park; George Price, Deputy Superintendent at Lowell National Historical Park, and Regional Director Marie Rust.

In her welcoming remarks, Ms. Rust said that the most (cont'd, page 4.)

VAN BUREN'S DINING TABLE continued

The extension has reeded legs and brass feet but no casters compared to the table's curved splayed and reeded legs with brass caps and casters.

The mahogany New York Regency style table, while unsigned, is reminiscent of the furniture produced at the famous New York shop of Duncan Phyfe. It is thought to have been bought in New York in 1816 when New York State Senator Martin Van Buren, with the assistance of his friend and associate Benjamin F. Butler, purchased furnishings for his Albany residence. It is not known if the table was used in the White House

the park. With the front hall wallpaper restoration in progress, the table was placed in the breakfast room but without the leaves because of room size. Shortly thereafter the table was sold at Christie's in New York and for the next nine years was in a private residence along the Hudson.

Upon learning of the table's availability in May every effort was made by Martin VanBuren National Historic Site to purchase it, but that was impossible due to the limitation of time and cost. It was decided detailed drawing and photographs should be made. This project was completed at the auction house by John Kovacik, a master cabinet maker and draftsman.

President Van Buren. The bidding began, rapidly at first and then seemingly coming to a halt. Then a phone bid was received and action became brisk again until the gavel fell and the phone bidder had purchased the table. The carousel turned and the table was gone.

Sotheby's obviously did as they had said they would, and gave the letter to the new owner, for ten days later Superintendent Stewart received a phone call from Leigh Keno, representative of the new owners, who called to say that Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Rubin would like to loan the table to Martin Van Buren National Historic Site if we would be interested in having it for a short time.



but in 1829, a "set dining tables" were packed and sent to Washington and a few months later Van Buren ordered "30 dining chairs" from New York. After retiring from Washington, the President removed a wall and relocated the stairway of Lindenwald's front hall to allow the table to become the center of social and family affairs.

Since that time the table spent 120 years in the family Aaron Vanderpoel, a prominent lawyer, son of President Van Buren's physician and purchaser of the table after the President's death. In 1982, the bicentennial of Van Buren's birth, the table was loaned to

On June 24, 1993, this time at Sotheby's in New York, the table was sold. Lindenwald's Acting Curator Judy Harris, carrying a letter written by Superintendent Bruce Stewart for Sotheby's to deliver to the new owners, former site Curator Michael Henderson, and future site Curator Phyllis Ewing attended the sale. Arriving several hours before the scheduled sale time, all three curators enjoyed examining the table, even crawling under it to see the fine appointments and details. Then the moment came when the table appeared on the sale carousel and the auctioneer spoke about its association with

The day after the table arrived, I spoke with Mr. Keno and was told that the deliverymen had never seen such excitement, fascination, and interest as was displayed at Lindenwald when the table was brought into the house. The arrival of the table that day was truly a grand event. Even though the table was here in 1984, not since 1864 has the table graced the front hall fully extended in the manner it was much of the time during the days of its original owner, President Martin Van Buren.

Phyllis Ewing, Curator
Lindenwald

"AMERICA'S BEST" - continued

important resource the National Park Service has is not the parks, but its' people--the employees. We left Springfield feeling good about ourselves and the National Park Service, where it came from, how the parks perform today and most importantly, where the Park Service is going in the future. We were encouraged to take existing paradigms and stretch or change them toward new ideas. The question put to us was "What is impossible to do right now, but, if you could do it, would fundamentally change your business?" We were pleased to find Marie Rust a very accessible director and she invited us to write suggestions on idea cards she promised she would read. A short slide presentation of all the winners "doing their thing" ended the session. We thank Bruce, Marie, and her staff for the memorable day.

Marion Berntson, Supervisor,
Park Rangers, Lindenwald

SPECIAL EVENTS

We hope that you have attended most, if not all, of the great programs we had this year at the Lindenwald.

Mark your calendars for the remaining events:

- Aug. 29 Eleanor Roosevelt,
Living History by Eleana Dodd, 2 p.m.
- Sept. 12 Concert: Patriotic selections by the
Philmont Chorus, 2 p.m.
- Sept. 25-26 Civil War Encampment, Union camp of
instruction, Battery "B"1 RI Lt. Artillery &
125th NY Vol. Infantry. All day, Sat. and
Sun.
- Dec. 4 Candlelight Open House. 5 - 7 p.m.

FRIENDS OF LINDENWALD

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