

Bush House Museum is interesting, educational

Holly Hamlin

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The curator looked pleased to see us as she opened the large door and invited us into Bush House.

She explained that visitors to the historic house are much rarer in the winter months.

We believed her — the last entry in the guest book was dated three days earlier.

Funny it's more crowded in the summer.

My family didn't think of touring the house when the weather was bright and inviting.

We weren't interested in leaving the gorgeous rose garden, the vast grassy fields or the fun play equipment.

It wasn't until the trees stood naked and gray that I brought up the topic. "Who wants to go to Bush House?"

"You mean at Bush Park?"

"Yes, but we'll go on an actual tour of the house."

"Is it that place with all the art?"

"No, that is the barn. The house is the taller building."

At this point, two things occurred to me.

First, it had been a long time since we'd toured the museum.

Second, when young kids are playing at a park, they might be unaware of other things like, say, a looming two-story house.

My 6-year-old continued, "What does it look like?"

"A house," my 10-year-old sighed.

To begin our tour, the guide asked us where we were from.

The only visitor who wasn't part of our family explained that he was originally from Salem but had been living out of the country.

"I'm just here for a walk down memory lane," he commented.

I guess you could say that we were all there for a walk down memory lane whether the

Bush House Museum

Location: 600 Mission St. SE, Salem

Hours: 1 to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays March – April; noon to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays May – September; 1 to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays October – December; January – February, please call for hours.

Phone: (503) 363-4714

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Cost: \$4, \$3 for seniors/students, \$2 for ages 6 to 12

memories were our own or those of the Bush family.

The first room was the formal sitting room.

It was very impressive with original wallpaper and furniture.

Two portraits flanked the marble fireplace.

One was of the self-made man who played a big role in Salem's early years; the other of his wife who didn't live to see the house built.

The informal parlor held a large Christmas tree decorated with antique glass ornaments.

On the other side of the room stood something that I remembered from my earliest Bush House visits: an upright player piano.

Our guide sat and pumped the pedal, and Christmas music filled the room.

My 10-year-old, who'd earlier complained about practicing the piano, looked jealous.

We moved from room to room.

As we did, we learned more about the Bush family. Besides the personal stories, which we asked for when our guide didn't volunteer them, we met them through their home.

Examples of Bush's wealth and appreciation for grandness were visible from the ornate mirrors that traveled around the Horn in vats of oil to the elaborate fireplaces.

The Bush family also led Salem in adopting modern amenities with their indoor plumbing that required a custom-made bathtub to their flush toilet.

Throughout the house were autograph books, which had belonged to different young ladies of the family.

They were signed with fancy writing and careful thoughts.

A huge difference from the way modern schoolgirls correspond with their BFFs.

It was fun watching my kids experience the house. They listened carefully to the different stories and facts and asked questions we all wanted answers to. When told that the fancy flower art piece upstairs was made with human hair, they got the same disgusted look I remember getting when I was young.

I didn't expect them to be impressed with things like banisters and wallpaper, but they were.

At one point my daughter asked me, "Isn't this wallpaper awesome? It's iridescent."

After visiting all the rooms, our guide asked if we had anymore questions, and we hadn't. If there was more to learn about the house and its family, we didn't know what it would be.

As we exited, my older kids asked if they could go play by the Crooked House.

My 6-year-old looked confused for a minute then said, "The Crooked House? Oh, I forgot all about that."

Holly Hamlin lives in Salem with her husband and four children ranging from ages infant to 12.

Kid Trips appears Tuesdays in this section. Write to Kid Trips, Statesman Journal, P.O. Box 13009, Salem, OR 97309-3009. Letters can be faxed to (503) 399-6706 or e-mailed to STEFHAM@Comcast.net