

Road, River, Rail

New Museum Tells The Story Of Jordans Point



Stephanie Mikels Blevins photo

Years Of Planning, Work Leads To Miller's House Museum

BY DICK HALSETH

East Lexington, once a bustling community anchored at Jordans Point, shows only a few remains to tell the story of this industrial area.

The most visible structure is the Miller's House built around 1811. If you look carefully you will see the remains of a canal gauge dock, walled w h a r f areas

along the end of Woods Creek, stone supports of the old cotton mill and the railroad trestle in the mill race behind the Miller's House.

Bringing this area to life begins on Saturday, May 21, with the grand opening of the Miller's House Museum.

What better time than May, Preservation Month, to introduce this new museum dedicated to telling the fascinating story of the Great Wagon Road, the James River and Kanawha Canal system and the advent of the railroads serv-

ing Lexington, Buena Vista and Rockbridge County from the 1700s through the 1900s. The Miller's House served as housing for many families, including the manager of the Lexington Roller Mills owned by the Moses brothers. It is the only remaining structure to have survived the numerous freshets (floods) that finally, in 1969, destroyed the other remaining structures on the Point.

In 2001 the Historic Lexington Foundation purchased the derelict building and gifted it to the city of Lexington.

Initially the city wished to restore it for a visitor's center with a park and a walking trail over the remaining rail-



A MODEL of a bateau can be seen with a ship's lantern in the background. (Stephanie Mikels Blevins photo)

road trestle foundation as a low water bridge to the north side of the Maury River to connect with the Chessie Trail. In securing two federal Department of Transportation grants the

house was restored inside and out. These grants included a requirement that the city turn the

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Tours, Booths, Music Highlight Grand Opening

Guided tours, old-time music, demonstrations, children's games and informational booths will all be a part of the celebration of the grand opening of the Miller's House Museum this Saturday, May 21, from 1 to 4 p.m.

Other preservation, history and education groups will join the Miller's House Museum volunteers in the celebration, including the Historic Lexington Foundation, Rockbridge Historical Society, Virginia Canals & Navigation Society, Friends of the Chessie Trail, The Paxton House Society, Rockbridge Civil War Round Table, Boxerwood, Main Street Lexington, National Park Service, Rockbridge Area Tourism and Mountain Valley Preservation Association.

These organizations will have information booths set up to introduce visitors to their education and preservation activities.

There will also be demonstrations by a cobbler and fiber artists throughout the afternoon.

Guided tours of Jordans Point will be given at 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. led by Dan Pezzoni. Pezzoni has worked in historical preservation and architectural history since the 1980s, authoring over 100 National Register nominations as well as over 10 county architectural histories, including the recently published "The Architecture of Historic Rockbridge." The tours will start at the Miller's House.

Miller's House Museum Board

The members of the board of the Miller's House Museum board are as follows.

Officers: Dick Halseth, president; Steve Beck, vice president; Jean Clark, secretary; Jon Ellestad, treasurer.

Directors: Charles Bodie, Maia Browning, Philip de Vos, Don Gaylord, Skip Ravenhorst, Noah Simon, Gene Sullivan, Eric Wilson.

Advisers: Bobby Berkstresser, Tom Camden, Horace Douty, Will Harris, Dan Pezzoni, Elise Sheffield, Bill Trout, Jay Williams.



AMONG THE ITEMS on display at the Miller's House Museum are an Amtrak hat and a diesel locomotive bell. AT RIGHT is a table service from a Baltimore & Ohio dining car. (Stephanie Mikels Blevins photos)



Touring The Miller's House

As you enter the Miller's House the first thing you may notice is a sign with the theme of the museum: "Road, River, Rail: The Rise and Fall of an American Waterfront." Below on the wall is a slide show of over 90 historic pictures of the Lexington, Buena Vista and Rockbridge County.

To the room on the right you will begin a tour of the history of Jordans Point from the time of the Native Americans using the trail for hunting and gathering. A total of seven panels with supporting photographs tell the history of the devel-

opment of industry and commerce that made this area a once vibrant commercial center.

The first floor is dedicated to the road and river. You will find a slice of the arch from the old covered bridge and an interesting speed limit sign that once controlled traffic on the bridge. There is a 4-foot-long model of a bateau, including sweeps and poles. There is a pivot post from one of the canal lock gates from downstream of the Maury River.

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MODEL RAILROAD CLUB members Irwin McCumber, Richard Ford, John Tucker, Tex Benton and John Brocius work on the diorama of Jordans Point.