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## 4th Graders from Columbia City Elementary tour Caples House Museum

Julie Thompson Jun 1, 2018



On Friday, May 25, two 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes from Columbia City Elementary School had the opportunity to tour the Caples House Museum as part of their Oregon Trail curriculum. It was one of the very few days where the tour guides dressed in Oregon Trail prairie clothes while they taught the children the prairie-time art of candle-making, toy making, and how our ancestors washed their clothes.

"It went really well," Caples Chairman Cindy Parnell said. "The common theme that we kept hearing from the kids was that they knew it was a history museum, but they didn't realize that they would be actually doing things."

Parnell and volunteers provided what they call a 'living history experience' for the students. The classes were split into groups of four that were then taken to separate stations manned by a tour guide to learn different aspects of Oregon Trail history.

At one station, they learned to make candles the old-fashioned way. At another, authentic, antique tools from the 1800s, including a coffee grinder, a stereo optic reader, a rug beater, a copper boiler, a packsaddle and an old apple peeler. Their guide let the children take turns guessing what they thought the tools were intended for, before showing them how they actually worked.

The students were also given the opportunity to tour the estate, where they were taught about the history of the Caples family and how they traveled the Oregon Trail.

"I just kind of tried to bring Oregon history into it by showing them the beaver hat, that's the reason folks came here in the first place, they needed to trap those furs. They were fascinated with the parts of the house that they'd never been to before," volunteer guide Terry Maloney said.

"They were floored that there was no bathroom in the house," Maloney laughed. "What did they do?! Did they have port-o-potties?" So, we talked about the chamber pot under the bed."

The students were also taught about the difference in pioneer life for little boys and girls, as they often had many chores they were responsible for. "That seemed to be a big one. They were all kind of surprised at how much work the kids would do 150 years ago," Parnell said.

The Caples House Museum complex takes up an entire city block in Columbia City. Dr. Charles Green Caples built the two-story home from logs cut near Monticello, Washington (now Longview) in 1807. The Caples family occupied the home until 1959.

The house contains a parlor, doctor's office, kitchen and pantry, and three bedrooms, all with antique furniture. Other buildings on the grounds include a wash house, tool shed, and an old carriage house that has been converted into what is now called the 'Childrens' Attic,' which contains a display of old dolls, toys, and children's' items.

The Oregon State Society Daughters of the American Revolution (OSSDAR) bought the property and reopened it as museum in 1970.

"Our mission is historic preservation, education and patriotism, which to us means helping soldiers and veterans. So, when we do school tours, we handle two of the three by doing the education and historic preservation," Parnell said. "We quizzed them all. They all seemed to know Oregon Trail really well, they know about the Columbia River and about the settlers coming up this way, so their background that they learned in their class really helped them to prepare for today."

Parnell said they plan to invite the students back in September for their annual Harvest Festival, where they will have the opportunity to pick apples and make cider with the museum's cider press.

"A few of the kids had been here before. A lot of them either walk to school by here or drive by on the bus and they said they'd wondered what was in these buildings but never knew," Parnell said. "We were really encouraged that all the kids said they'd like to come back."

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