

Hogmanay Remembered: Stephanie Ford Forrester

Once upon a time, less than a year after arriving in the Peterborough/ Lakefield area, I saw an ad in the Examiner job listings, "Curator Wanted " it said. Having been just such a person for a small museum in Westport On, I made my way to Hutchison House for the first time, and was greeted by Betty Hinton at the front door for a tour of the House. She sensed something and asked if there was anything else she could do so I answered, yes, I am here to apply for the Curator's position, and she whisked me to the office where the kitchen is now.

Following a long delay after the applications in the early fall of 1991 were accepted and interviews had been done, and having heard nothing at all, I moved on with my life, but then came a call, would I come for a second round, which I gladly did. In short order, I was offered the job and started in the great busyness of pre-Christmas school programs and planning for Hogmanay. Both Gale Fewings (at HH on a research grant) secretary Connie Thompson and Linda Chandler, and of course the many volunteers, were of tremendous help as I did not understand what hosting Hogmanay really meant. Indeed, at the very beginning, I was not sure at all what the word Hogmanay meant. I learned very quickly. And having only been measured for a period costume by the one and only Barbara Earle at that very early time, was in regular 1990's dress, not costume for that extraordinary introduction to life at Hutchison House.

Then the Examiner ran an interview/article and photo on "the new Curator at Hutchison House" in that low news period between Christmas and New Years, giving it a full 1/4 page. Well, to put it very mildly, this was advertising you cannot buy and everyone came. Over 400 people showed up that day, well beyond the capacity of the House to accommodate. Opening at 1pm we ran out of food by 1:30, you literally could not move across the Keeping Room to the kitchen, bookshop and Harvey Connal Room, we ran out of Scotch and whipping cream to make the Atholl Brose by 1:45pm and were sending Board Members home to raid their liquor cabinets (which they graciously did) and sending volunteers running to the convenience stores for cream, and on it went, close to chaos. The volunteer guides in the upstairs rooms were all talked out. The Fire Department would not have been amused, and all of us were exhausted. I can recall thinking "Is this what Hogmanay is like every year?" Mercifully, that has not been the case. That one pushed us all well beyond enjoying a good crowd and into the territory of great concern and moments of near panic.

And then, another year in the mid 1990s, there was the haggis that exploded in the slightly overheated warming pot, meaning we had to strain all the stuffing out of the hot water into a bowl and apologize to the brave gentleman who gave the "Address to a Haggis" that year for its sorry appearance in a bowl and to the visitors who were puzzled by the bowl being ceremoniously "pierced" with the dirk during that address.

And more recently, which Gale and Don W are most closely aware of was the faulty old refrigerator deciding the night before Hogmanay, to drop to below zero C. and freeze the carefully made and chilled Scotch eggs, making them all unusable. That required boiling new eggs on Hogmanay morning, slipping them out of the frozen egg cases and replacing freshly hard boiled egg quarters to the sausage casings we were able to save. Another point of near chaos averted by the willing volunteers and staff of HH.

I should not even mention my crazy idea in the early 1990's of baking our own baguettes on Hogmanay morning from frozen bread dough, not quite realizing how long it takes to THAW and RISE the dough, even before baking it. I had thought, "how special for guests to enter the House through the front door and be greeted with the scent bread baking". Lovely thought, not so

lovely in the reality of preparation for a major event. I learned great many things "on the job" over my years as Curator and this was one of them; listen to the experienced Volunteers when they suggest that such an idea, though a nice thought, is unworkable. Or better, yet, just listen to them about almost anything.

Stephanie Ford Forrester