

HEADLINERS

The Kids Report: The Wedding

For Museums and Galleries month, young reviewers discover a uniquely involving theatrical exhibit at the Ulster American Folk Museum.

Young journalists from Children's Express tell us what they thought of Museums and Galleries Month events around the country.

Ulster American Folk Park He even approached us with a charming grin and said 'If I hadn't met my Mary, I'd a picked you...'

Omagh, Northern Ireland

When you attend a wedding you expect to see an exuberant bride all in white, an anxious groom, a mass of silly hats, a forest of flowers and a downpour of confetti. Not so if you attended the wedding at the Ulster American Folk Park on Sunday 27th May.

For last week, the staff at the Park recreated a frontier wedding from 200 years ago. There was no sign of confetti, lavish reception or a white limousine (nor even a church!) Visitors were taken on a fantastic and hilarious journey back to Virginia, USA circa 1795 to witness the nuptials of Jacob McClure and Mary Brown.

The road to matrimony began with a charismatic Reverend preacher taking his captive audience from a small shopping square, down a rural lane to the homestead of Cornelia Brown and her son Jacob, the groom. The preacher, speaking in a good ol' southern accent, was convincing in his black gown and large, rimmed black hat.

The audience followed him every step of the way, as he led us around the rural homesteads of the bride, groom and their respective families. Jacob McClure was a bit of a rogue! Despite his imminent wedding Jacob wasted no time in flirting with female members of the audience. He even approached us with a charming grin and southern drawl, 'If I hadn't met my Mary, I'd a picked you.'

Mary, his intended, was more of a shrinking violet. Obviously excited by the occasion of her wedding she still appeared bashful and shy around the audience. Her love struck awe when Jacob presented her with a pine-carved heart (a pre-wedding gift) said so much. The poor couple couldn't have a moment to themselves before the ceremony, as their families and the audience relentlessly surrounded them. Primarily, this was because it was a scandalous matter in those days for a couple to be unchaperoned.

The wedding ceremony was a very simple affair. The couple retreated into Mary's house, along with the preacher, best man, bridesmaid (Mary's spinsterish sister, Martha) and principal members of their family. Unfortunately, audience members were not allowed into the house to witness the nuptials.

However, we were permitted to see the bridal party before the wedding. Mary beamed and blushed as she showed off her wedding dress. In keeping with the period this was rather plain and unadorned. Whilst it may not have caught anyone's eye today, in 1795 Mary's simple dress was considered pretty grand. With her light brown hair swept from her face, and a small, lacy headdress acting as a veil, Mary Brown looked every bit the 18th century Irish-American rose.

Jacob McClure wore a red shirt with a green waistcoat, tight fitting trousers with braces and black tri-corner hat and brown shoes (known as 'straights'). Each of the men wore rather similar outfits, as monotony was the fashion of the day.

Later at the wedding party we sampled traditional 18th century American food: pecan and pumpkin pies, ginger cake, cornbread and the ominously named 'shoefly pie'! The only beverage drunk was cider. There was no three-tier wedding cake, Jake and Mary making do with a small ginger cake, luxury at that time.

The audience was led to a barn, where a bluegrass quartet, The Foghorns, delighted us with folksy music. We joined the actors in some raucous barn dancing! Mary sang a beautiful traditional song, 'Shenandoah' before tearfully departing for her life with Jacob in the new Frontier.

The whole day was an enjoyable and entertaining experience. The actors perfectly portrayed their roles as Irish immigrants, and the entire performance benefited from the friendly interaction with the audience. The only disappointment was the wedding ceremony being off-stage. That aside, the performances were excellent, an enjoyable and educational experience, perfect for a family day out.

About the team

This story was produced by Children's Express reporters Clare Hughes, 15, and Jenny McMahon, 14, members of Children's Express Belfast bureau. It was published in the Museums Journal. For more reviews, see column, left..

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