

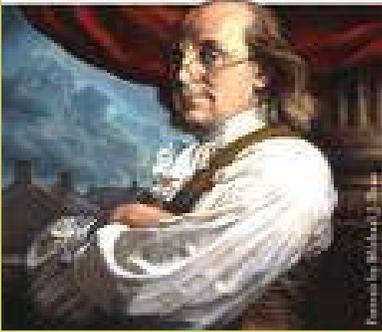
# Colonial Hearth Days

October 24-25, 2013

Peggy McGhee's Farm

339 Long Mill Road

Franklinton, North Carolina



BEN FRANKLIN SOCIETY

[www.BenFranklinSocietyNC.org](http://www.BenFranklinSocietyNC.org)



## “Hearth of the County II” by Marion Blackburn

### BEN FRANKLIN SOCIETY Project Perspective

The Declaration of Independence, read by a volunteer in genuine Colonial dress, captivated the school children. A few minutes earlier, the kids learned about the Underground Railroad, and visited with a real Revolutionary War soldier.

These authentic activities took place on a scenic Franklin County farm during the Colonial Hearth Days event. This year marked the second at Peggy McGhee's farm, which welcomed kids from Franklinton, Louisburg and Laurel Mill elementary schools to experience life during the 1700 and 1800s. They watched soap makers, weaving, blacksmithing, and fabric arts, among other displays.

A special attraction this year was the new Heritage Garden, a from-seed, hand-plowed bed in full-bloom during the autumn event. It featured lettuces, herbs like rosemary, thyme, sage, mint, and other vegetables. The garden dovetails with the hearth cooking display and other long-term projects McGhee plans.



The events were made possible with many volunteer hours, and sponsorship from the Ben Franklin Society, a nonprofit dedicated to honoring the spirit of its namesake, for whom the county is named. For them, it was worth the hours of planning to know they made a difference.

“By all accounts it was successful,” McGhee said. The visit to the farm house, deep in rural Franklin County, gave school kids a look at Colonial life hundreds of years ago. The Colonial Hearth field trip and farm visit served the long-term vision of the Ben Franklin Society to spotlight and promote the county’s history and natural resources. More than 200 children visited the farm during the event, which had support from the United Way of Franklin County, Novozymes North America and the Franklin County Schools.

While most people consider school children a tough audience, the visit to McGhee’s farm proved so interesting that no one missed electronics, computers or chairs as they stopped to watch the activities at each of 12 demonstration sites, with a picnic lunch on the grass. Life hundreds of years ago had unexpected appeal for the kids, who found making – instead of buying – what you needed could be an adventure.

“You didn’t just go to a store and buy things,” said Diane Schaaf, who along with Fannie Brown, Jo Ann Waterman, Mary Lou Smith and Samantha Rordarmel staffed a tent about needlework. “If you wanted a sweater in winter, you’d have to knit it.”



## Franklin County

For Colonial Hearth Day, fourth-graders from the three schools visited 12 tent stations to see traditional crafts such as soap making and beekeeping. They even participated in some, such as washing clothes in a tub. Inside McGhee’s detached log kitchen, they smelled fresh soup being

cooked over a fire. The experience provided a break from traditional classroom learning but also advanced the state’s requirement that fourth-graders study North Carolina history. As they walked around the meadow in front of McGhee’s home, volunteers in period costumes showed them quilt making, blacksmithing and even a real-life musket firing.

“They can actually see, touch, smell – and do,” said Karla Webber, a teacher at Franklin Elementary. “They can see it in a book, but to be able to touch things is amazing.”

The event made real the often overlooked history of their home. Franklin County took shape in 1779, while the American Revolutionary War was taking place in the countryside of the Thirteen Colonies. Located in the northeastern third of the state, it was more highly populated than areas west. Its county seat reflects its revolutionary origins – Louisburg is named for the French King Louis XVI who reigned at the time and who served as an American ally. The Tar River provided abundant water for the settlers, just as it did for thousands of acres of traditional farmland still located (and operating) in the county. Indeed, it was formerly a central transportation link for timber, textile and agricultural production. Dense clay and rolling hills create a distinctive landscape.

The Ben Franklin Society took its name from the iconic inventor and statesman, as did the county. It aims to honor Franklin’s legacy by encouraging collaborative research and educational projects. As George Washington was the acknowledged military leader of the Revolution, Franklin was the inventive intellectual of the times. The society operates as a nonprofit membership organization founded in 2008. Bob Radcliffe is founder and chairman of its nine-member board of directors.

A civil engineer and former Penn State University instructor, Radcliffe came to Franklin County about 15 years ago from Philadelphia. In his new home, he saw great potential in the history, agricultural heritage and natural setting. He believed these assets could attract investment and tourism to the largely rural county and created the Ben Franklin Society to help promote regional development. Projects like

Colonial Hearth Day serve that goal.

"We're a very rural county, and the Ben Franklin Society can help attract people to visit here," he said. "To ride bicycles, to have road races – anything that's recreational, we've got the space. These experiences can create an exciting future for the county." He envisions projects focusing on local crafts and open spaces. Toward that goal, he has begun an inventory of grist mill sites in the county that could become a mapped bike tour.

### Colonial Hearth Day 2013

Colonial Hearth Day 2012 served as a prototype for this year, Radcliffe said.

"It's hard to imagine a better match for the state's teaching requirements for its fourth-graders, which include making sure kids understand its Colonial heritage and ethnic traditions," Radcliffe said. "The state wants school kids to understand regional resources and differences. This project is a great way to accomplish that goal." He would like all county fourth-graders to visit to McGhee's farm each year.

An imaginative approach meant lessons and historic material became part of the needlework demonstration. Handmade quilts featured symbols used by the former slaves traveling north on secret routes known as the Underground Railroad. Among the images slaves used to find their way to safe houses were a monkey wrench, wagon wheel, sail boats and even a log cabin.

"Kids are creative," Smith said. "They are able to go outside the box. They question and aren't afraid to try things." McGhee hoped to reach that natural curiosity when she envisioned the project.

A long-time educator and former schools superintendent, she spent about a year planning the event. "I've been thinking about it a long time," she said.

A combination of curiosity and daring drew kids to the blacksmith area, where Scott McGhee (Peggy's son) and Connor McGhee (her grandson) fired and shaped metal to create hooks for each classroom. Scott McGhee works professionally as a blade smith, giving demonstrations and

showing his knives nationally. The fire heats the metal to about 2,400 degrees F, turning it bright orange. He positioned it on the anvil, a large metal block, and struck it with a hammer to shape it into a point.



Nearby, kids saw wood with carpenter David Pavon Rosado. A cedar wood smell gave the group a real sense of the woodworking world. They helped David split wood with a froe and cut with a two-man saw, reminding them that in the Colonial world, everything was handmade.



Agricultural re-enactor, Aaron Snowell, explained how cotton, tobacco and sweet potatoes were grown and shipped from the colonies to England in exchange for tools and consumer goods.



A few feet away, Diane Hoyle and Sarah Hagwood warmed animal tallow, or melted fat, along with lye to create authentic soap.

With his reenactment-worthy uniform and regulation, crown-issue British Brown Bess musket, Charles Powell explained to his rapt audience that he was a lucky soldier, since he had a blanket. After all, the troops could expect to be in winter camp through the cold snowy months but supplies were thin.



His role as a British soldier meant he reflected the crown's perspective – the colonies were causing trouble by rebelling against the throne.

“Great Britain rules the world,” he said in character to the kids. Later he observed that his attention to authentic detail helps them understand how soldiers lived and gave them a sample of the real world behind the timeline.



During lunch break, the children were entertained with period readings and music. Settlers carried very little – and usually only essentials for survival. They



could carry stories and songs, however, without adding to their physical burden. They chronicled their daily lives the New World with songs and ballads that sustained them.

Harriet Pavon Rosado recited “Papa Dallas” from the book *Remembering Slavery*, (1998), edited by Ira Berlin. Music served as a constant connection to home for the settlers, reminding them of the beloved people and places they left behind. Sondra Edwards and her grandchildren, Cora and Jack Williamson, performed “Soldier Will You Marry Me?” Edith Anderson brought her choral ensemble that sang three spirituals.



Inside the kitchen cabin, a fire kept the room warm despite the autumn chill outside. Savory aromas escaped the hearty soup cooking over it. The large brick hearth created a sense of comfort for the kids, as it would have for Colonial settlers many centuries ago. Then, as now, the hearth is the home.

#### STUDENT COMMENTS

*“This was one of the best trips I’ve ever experienced.”*

*“My favorite part of your awesome farm was the kitchen. I liked it because I actually saw the way the Colonial time settlers lived. It was so cool.”*

*“I love Colonial times living. I think I could live back then, only if I was the hunter of the tribe. I would love if I could come back and spend another day there.”*

*“So much information, I just loved learning it all.”*

#### BEN FRANKLIN SOCIETY

Created in 2008 as a non-profit agency. Dedicated to transforming under-utilized Franklin County assets into new and useful area resources. Society projects are competitively selected for their future educational, scientific and literary value. Franklin County UNITED WAY, and NOVOZYMES North America with corporate offices in Franklinton, have supported our Project initiatives.

The Society created the Franklin BreadWorks – a collaboration between the Society and Lynch Creek Farm – to offer monthly Dining and Entertainment Fund-raising Events. Both are headquartered at Radcliffe’s Lynch Creek Farm, where an authentic log cabin serves as the society’s headquarters and picnic grounds.

Society membership starts at \$5, with no charge for students, and ranges to \$100 for corporate membership. Members are entitled to receive a monthly BreadWorks Newsletter, to attend Quarterly Meetings with invited speakers, and to bring guests to scheduled BreadWorks Events. For more information visit

[www.BenFranklinSocietyNC.org](http://www.BenFranklinSocietyNC.org)

*Marion Blackburn is a writer, editor and project manager who lives in Greenville, N.C. Her articles have appeared in Archaeology magazine and other publications. A public radio commentator and short story writer, she completed graduate work at the Sorbonne in Paris before starting her career as a journalist and writer.*

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