

NOTE: Hike through History runs from 9:00-2:30 on Thursday, May 31 throughout downtown South Berwick, Maine and Rollinsford, NH.



Photo caption:

South Berwick Central Elementary School third graders practice using pens and inkwells during their simulation of a schoolhouse of the 1800s at the Counting House Museum. The program prepared them for the upcoming Hike through History, when on May 31, hundreds of students will discover historic sites in South Berwick and Rollinsford and meet Marshwood Middle School students presenting people who lived here.

Students Explore Childhood of Yesteryear on Hike through History

SOUTH BERWICK, Maine – What was childhood really like here in the 1800s? On the Hike through History on May 31, about 600 elementary students, along with many teachers and family members, will spend the day walking from South Berwick Central School to tour local historic sites. There, third graders and about 180 eighth graders from Marshwood Middle School will portray real local residents from the past. Through role playing, older students will teach the younger ones and bring to life the 22 interactive sites they will visit.

In preparation for the Hike, slates, inkwells, and manners were on hand recently for third graders visiting the Counting House Museum to take up roles of their counterparts in the South Berwick of the late 1800s.

“The theme of this year's Hike is Childhood,” said Erin Johnson, who coordinates the Old Berwick Historical Society’s museum program preparing the third graders for this year’s Hike through History. “Kids will be studying the ways children of the past contributed to their families, schools, and communities.”

Dressed in vests and aprons worn by girls and boys over 100 years ago, students curtsied and bowed to greet a volunteer impersonating Miss Olive Raynes, a beloved South Berwick teacher, in a simulation of her one-room schoolhouse.

The “Village School” program at the Counting House was developed by the Old Berwick Historical Society and teachers of Maine School Administrative District 35. Their project won a Maine Preservation Statewide Honor Award an award for community collaboration in 2013.

Cynthia Gagnon, Linda Becker and Joan Reilly, all experienced teachers or former teachers, volunteered to play Miss Raynes on various days at the Counting House.

Nine other historical society members assisted throughout the week as children computed arithmetic on slates, dipped pens into inkwells to practice cursive handwriting, and stood to read aloud from a “The Franklin Fourth Reader,” a book actually used by South Berwick pupils.

After a reading lesson called “The Clothes We Wear” explained the natural materials found in children’s clothes in the days before polar fleece and plastic zippers, the students then moved through the museum with clipboards, locating articles on display in exhibits.

“We feel so fortunate that our museum is within walking distance from Central Elementary School,” said historical society vice-president Nicole St. Pierre. “Every year we welcome students for a week of history programs tied to that year’s Hike through History route and theme, and have a wonderful time sharing our collection and history with kids.”

This year’s Hike will take advantage of South Berwick Central School’s location on the Maine/New Hampshire border. Students will cross a bridge over a historic waterfall to follow the footsteps of factory workers at the Salmon Falls Manufacturing Company in Rollinsford, NH.

Eighth-grade interpreters will meet the young children at stops along the way. Some will, for example, explain how cloth was made under difficult working conditions, and demonstrate life in a boarding house.

The Hike through History coordinators are Pam Mulcahey, Tracy Lapointe, Nicole St. Pierre, Linda Becker, and Rachel Wendell. “The Hike provides engaging, authentic local history resources to introduce students to history studies using actual places and people of our own community,” said St. Pierre.

“Both the eighth grade and third grade interpreters do a fantastic job, first conducting their own historical research, and then communicating what they learn to a younger audience,” she added.

This year’s hike is generously sponsored by Edwards Jones Investments/Deb DeColfmacker, Great Works Chiropractic, P. Gagnon & Son Oil, Inc., The Red Barn at Outlook Farm, Urban Tree Service, and Wentworth-Douglass Hospital. The Old Berwick Historical Society, an all-volunteer organization with over 200 members, operates the Counting House as a community history museum serving southeastern Maine and seacoast New Hampshire. Located in a 19th century mill building, the museum is open on weekends from June to October and year round by appointment.