

# Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation

Plymouth, Vermont  
(802) 672-3389

SUMMER 2003



*Karen Mansfield, Betty Masterson and Nick Nickolaidis with prize winning quilt made by a 15 year old.*

The education committee has been very busy since January. We sent scholarship applications and information to Massachusetts and Vermont colleges, and shortly thereafter mailed posters and letters to Vermont elementary and middle schools regarding our annual Age of Coolidge Contest. We also sent this contest information to home-schoolers throughout the state.

There were 27 applications for scholarships, and after careful review, Don Wickman, Ann Billings and Sue Pollender, this year's judges, awarded the scholarship to Andrea Ponte, a Junior at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Last year's winner, Hannah Kane, will also be awarded a scholarship for the second year.

We received a total of 137 Age of Coolidge Contest entries from schools and home-schoolers around the state. The students were asked to submit entries based on the topic "Vermont is a

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## Summer Events at President Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site Sponsored by the Coolidge Foundation

**July 27**

*Calvin Coolidge Concert*

4 p.m.

"The Rosamund Trio"

**August 2**

*Plymouth Old Home Day*

10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

National Advisory Board Panel

10 a.m.

Re-enactors of

"Calvin Coolidge,"

"Sojourner Truth" and

"Abraham Lincoln"

**August 3**

1 p.m.

*Annual Meeting*

**August 24**

*Calvin Coolidge Concert*

4 p.m.

"The Great American Songbook"

Sabrina Brown,

Fred Haas and His Quintet

**September 20**

"Cheese and Harvest Festival"

with Jim Cooke as

"Calvin Coolidge"

and in Bennington, Vermont

**September 21**

Re-enactment of the

Bennington speech

"Vermont Is a State I Love"

Annual Dinner at

Park McCullough House



*National Guardsmen with the wreath from President G. W. Bush to in honor of President Coolidge before the march to the cemetery.*

The tradition goes on: again this year, the Vermont National Guard delivered a wreath and led the march from Plymouth Notch to the cemetery where the Coolidge family lies buried. Guest speaker, CCMF board member and author, Howard Coffin stood on the terrace beside their gravestones as he delivered his address quoting both Calvin and Grace in a talk that evoked the wisdom of both.

Later a concert by the Baasch Family (father, mother, son and two daughters from Rutland, VT) filled the Union Christian Church with classical, Irish and patriotic music.

The Hunter Lea Gallery in nearby Ludlow offered a CCMF benefit with a special showing of paintings depicting the lovely Coolidge birthplace of Plymouth Notch.

A truly lovely birthday celebration for Calvin Coolidge, born July 4, 1872.



## CCMF RECEIVES GIFT OF GRACE COOLIDGE LETTERS



PLYMOUTH NOTCH, VT. - A collection of 201 letters that once belonged to Grace Coolidge have been presented to the Calvin Coolidge Foundation. Included are letters written in the White House, at Plymouth Notch, in the Coolidges' three homes in Northampton, Massachusetts, and from the mountains of Tryon, North Carolina, where Mrs. Coolidge often vacationed.

Within the collection is what apparently was the last letter written by the Coolidges' youngest son, Calvin Jr., penned shortly before his death at age 16. Also included are letters commenting on life at The Notch, from the two Coolidge sons while at Mercersburg Academy, and many in which Grace Coolidge comments on her daily life, including observations about her famous husband. And there is a handwritten note from Aurora Pierce, the famed and frugal Vermont spinster lady who served as the Coolidges' housekeeper in Plymouth. Her signature is among the rarest of all American autographs.

The collection was given by Florence Coolidge, the wife of the Coolidges' oldest son, John, to her daughter Lydia (Coolidge) Sayles, granddaughter of Grace and Calvin. Lydia, who knew her grandmother well, died two years ago of cancer. Lydia was an enthusiastic supporter of the Coolidge Foundation and her husband, Jeremy Sayles, of Woodstock, has decided to present the letters to the Foundation.

"Lydia was very fond of Grace," said Sayles. "She often recalled how her mother would leave her and her sister Cynthia in Northampton with Grace, with the admonition, 'Now don't spoil the children.' Of course, right after lunch, she'd take them shopping, which was just what she wasn't supposed to do."

Sayles, a retired librarian, said he decided that the letters should be with the Coolidge Foundation at Plymouth Notch: "I think they will have value to scholars and researchers writing on the Coolidges, and the general study of the early 20th century. Many of the letters were written at The Notch."

Mimi Baird, President of the Board of Trustees of the Coolidge Foundation, said the gift adds a new dimension to the Foundation. "Increasingly, we are becoming a repository of manuscript material relating to the Coolidges. This is our most important such gift yet."

Cyndy Bittering, executive director of the Foundation, is in the process of organizing and preserving the letters, which are in excellent condition. The Grace Coolidge letters are both handwritten and typed. They will be available to scholars by this summer.

The letters fall into the following categories: those from the Coolidge sons, John and Calvin, to their parents from Mercersburg Academy, in Pennsylvania, where they were preparing for college; letters from Grace in the White House to her children and to Maude Trumbull, John Coolidge's mother-in-law; from John Coolidge to his mother after he began a career with the New York/New Haven Railroad and lived in New Haven, CT; from Grace to son John and his wife Florence; from Grace to her family from Plymouth Notch and from North Carolina.

Among the letters are the following:

—June 14, 1924, letter from Calvin Jr. to the White House discussing summer vacation plans, likely the last letter he wrote before his death on July 7, 1924.

—Aug. 1, 1932, letter from Grace at Plymouth Notch mentioning that on reaching there she found "the welcome is deep and wide as the universe" from the local people.

—April 23, 1934, from Grace vacationing in North Carolina, after President Coolidge's death, denying published reports that she planned to remarry "a prominent Republican politician."

—September 6, 1934, from Grace at Plymouth talking about stonework in progress on the Notch Cemetery around the Coolidge graves.

—September 11, 1949, Grace referencing her love of baseball and noting she had attended a Red Sox game with tickets provided by Sox General Manager Joe Cronin.

—September 10, 1956: Grace remembering the Coolidges' departure from the White House saying "we could head for home as idle as one of those painted ships on a painted sea."

—January 30, 1933: Grace commenting on her husband, "Life was always a serious matter to him. He never felt the need of play."

The letters continue into the last year of Grace Coolidge's life, and always display her upbeat outlook on life and sense of humor. She died July 8, 1957, in Northampton and was buried beside her husband and son at Plymouth Notch.

*Howard Coffin*



*Coolidge Home, Plymouth, Vermont*

*Kathy Wendling photo*

## VERMONT PUBLIC RADIO FOCUSES ON GRACE COOLIDGE'S LETTERS



The first week in July was selected by Vermont Public Radio for a daily commentary on the newly donated letters of Grace Coolidge and her family.

Calling it “Grace Coolidge’s Legacy in Letters” with 500 words each day read and commented upon by Executive Director Cyndy Bittinger. The series has aired at 7:55 a.m. with access on their web site at vpr.net. For those not able to hear the series, finding it on-line could work. The Coolidge Foundation will explore with VPR how to create more options for the listeners.

Ms. Bittinger took her talk “New Letters, New Insights” which she gave at the Vermont History Expo in Tunbridge on Sunday, June 22, and found 6 sections to read. The topic was

Grace Coolidge and the letters donated to CCMF by Jerry Sayles, widower of Lydia Coolidge Sayles, daughter of John and Florence Coolidge.

Some of the quoted letters to Ivah Gale, Grace’s best friend, were donated by Dartmouth College. The series was suggested to help honor the birthday of Calvin Coolidge on July 4th. Topics were Grace’s impending marriage to Calvin Coolidge, the death of Calvin Junior, the love of Vermont and especially Plymouth, baseball, love of son John, and poetry.

## CCMF’s National Board Co-Chairs



Professor Robert P. Watson is the editor of *White House Studies*, a publication of Nova Science Publishers with articles on historic sites and the presidency. He is the author or editor of 13 books and over 100 scholarly articles. He teaches in the Department of Political Science at Florida Atlantic University. He has taken an interest in First Ladies and conducted a poll on their ranking. He edited a one volume book for Salem Press entitled *American First Ladies* with articles on all 44.

As a presidential scholar, Watson was a special guest for CNN.com’s coverage of the 2001 presidential inauguration and directed the first “Report to the First Lady” for Laura Bush and Lynne Cheney. He has served as a visiting scholar/fellow at five universities. He has been a co-convenor of three presidential history conferences. He was a speaker for the Grace Coolidge Day organized by CCMF at the University of Vermont in September of 2002.



Peter Hannaford is best known for his role in assisting Ronald Reagan during the latter’s quest for the White House. From 1975 until his election in 1980, Reagan was a client of his firm, The Hannaford Company, a public relations consultancy. Hannaford was a director of issues and research for Reagan in 1976 and senior communications adviser in 1980. In 1972, Hannaford was the Republican nominee for the U.S. House of Representatives in California’s 7<sup>th</sup> district.

Author of numerous articles and nine books, Hannaford has edited *The Quotable Calvin Coolidge* (2001) and others on the presidency. They are *The Reagans: a Political Portrait* (1983), *Remembering Reagan* (1994), *The Quotable Ronald Reagan* (1998), *The Essential George Washington* (1999), and *Ronald Reagan and His Ranch: The Western White House, 1981-89* (2002).

Currently Hannaford is Senior Counselor to APCO Worldwide, a Washington based public affairs/strategic communications firm, and president of Hannaford Enterprises.

With the publication of *Quotable Calvin Coolidge*, Hannaford came to Plymouth and was the CCMF Annual Meeting speaker in 2001.

*Education report continued from page 1*

state I Love...” since this year we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Calvin Coolidge’s speech in Bennington. Nick Nikolaidis, Karen Mansfield and Betty Masterson had the difficult job of choosing 3 winners in each of two categories: grades 4-6 and grades 7-8. We received short stories, poems, three dimensional construction, a quilt, video and power point presentations.

The scholarship and school contest awards will be presented on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, Plymouth Old Home Day.

*Betty Masterson, Education Chair*



*Dr. Donald E. Harpster, Educational Coordinator for the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation, with two young presenters at this year’s contest.*

## COOLIDGE'S "VERMONT IS A STATE I LOVE" SPEECH TO BE COMMEMORATED

Plans to honor Calvin Coolidge's "Vermont is a State I Love," speech will be announced very soon. The Coolidge Foundation is meeting with the Vermont Humanities Council and other groups in Bennington to plan a way to commemorate the speech. Expected to participate in the re-enactment are Ruth Dewey, of Bennington, who witnessed the event, and well-known Coolidge interpreter Jim Cooke.

Coolidge delivered what may be the most famous words ever spoken by a Vermonter about his native state in a speech from the rear of a train at the Bennington railway station on Sept. 21, 1928.

Events at the station and at the Park McCullough house will mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the speech this fall.

In September, 1928, Coolidge toured Vermont to inspect recovery efforts in the wake of the devastating flood that had ravaged the state in the late autumn of 1927. He wound up his "27 Flood" tour with a speech at Bennington. More than 5,000 people listened as he closed his address with a passage that has been described as poetry. He began with the words:

... "Vermont is a state I love. I could not look on the peaks of Ascutney, Killington, Mansfield, and Equinox without being moved in a way no other scene could move me."

He concluded:

... "If the spirit of liberty should vanish in other parts of the Union and support of our institutions should languish, it could all be replenished from the generous store held by the people of this brave little state of Vermont."

Among organizations planning the September commemoration are the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation and the Park McCullough House. Mimi Baird of Woodstock, president of the Foundation, said recently, "The Foundation five years ago honored the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President Coolidge's homestead inaugural with a reenactment at Plymouth Notch and a seminar at the Kennedy Library in Boston. We want to make certain that this speech, one of the significant moments in our state's history, also gets its due."

The Vermont Humanities Council will be arranging Jim Cooke appearances as Calvin Coolidge during September at various schools along the route of the original 1928 train trip. CCMF and its Bennington partners will be arranging a re-enactment for Sunday, September 21. The day will end with an Annual Dinner for CCMF's benefit at Park McCullough House in Bennington.



### *Dear Member:*

Since our spring 2003 issue of this newsletter, the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation has been on the fast track. As President Coolidge said in a October 6, 1925 speech, "Progress depends very largely on the encouragement of variety." Over the winter and continuing into the spring, a number of different initiatives, some expected and some unexpected, have been evolving.

An unexpected gift from Middlebury College, from the Walter Cerf Collection, of a 1920 bronze bust of Grace Coolidge inspired some restoration efforts of the Union Christian Church. The foyer of the church has been repainted

and rearranged in order to display this stunning piece of art. Thanks to the inspiration of Frank Procopio, a CCMF member, this area of the church now freshly greets visitors. A great many of the improvements were donated to CCMF due to Frank's leadership. The restoration of the bust was made possible by the Coolidge Family in honor of Lydia Coolidge Sayles. This collaborative effort is an example of what can be done by interested and caring members.

Expected efforts include the development of guided tours of the President Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site. Jointly funded by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation and CCMF, Donald Harpster, CCMF Educational Coordinator, is working with Bill Jenney, the Site Administrator, on this promising initiative.

The inspiration and creation of the Summer Music Series 2003 by trustee, Judy Collins is well underway. Glenn Suokko, husband of trustee Ann Billings, set a tone of excellence in his design of the announcement of these Sun-

day afternoon concerts. With newspaper articles and posters, CCMF expects to welcome many attendees.

The Action Committee is moving ahead as expected. The committee identified the relationship with the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation as a major priority. The group met with VDHP this winter. At the upcoming meeting in August, the objective is to sign a document, known as 'A Memorandum of Understanding,' which states each organization's responsibilities, long range plans, and collaborative efforts. It is the unanimous feeling of the Action Committee that our communications with VDHP have been positive, forward-moving and in good spirit.

CCMF invites all members to join in celebrating the above initiatives, as well as those described elsewhere in this newsletter, this summer by coming to the Site and attending some of the scheduled events. Believe me, you will catch the energy.

*Mimi Baird, President, CCMF*

## A Special Encounter in a Special Place



I first discovered Plymouth Notch as a child, back in 1947. I have told this tale here before but it bears repeating. While returning with some friends from a visit to New York City, they, knowing how much I liked history, even then, surprised me with a stop in Plymouth Notch. It was Sunday, August 3!

The significance soon dawned on us: this was the anniversary of Calvin Coolidge's swearing in at the farmhouse across the street from the Union Church. When we learned that the Coolidges were in residence on that day, plans were quickly changed. My friends and I entered the church and sat in the pew directly behind the one with the flag—the Coolidge pew. After the service was over, my friends introduced us to Grace and John Coolidge. I stammered something to the effect that I planned to write about Calvin Coolidge for the forthcoming Edmund's Essay contest. The president's son signed the booklet that I had bought from his enterprising cousin in the church yard. His mother, Grace, signed too and I told everyone later that she lived up to her first name. To this day, I think the former first lady was most gracious.

More than fifty years later, I found myself on the board of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation, which owns the Union Christian Church building (the CCMF offices are in the basement.) It is this organization that hires the docents who greet the folk who come to the Calvin Coolidge State Site and drop in to see the lovely church. The church is located next to the country store where our nation's 30th president was born and across from the house where he was brought up and, subsequently, sworn in by his own father when President Harding died.

That church is worthy of a special visit. It was built in 1840 as a town meeting house, just the reverse of many such buildings. By 1842, it began service as the Union Christian Church. The Coolidge family, active Plymouth members from the beginning, took an interest in the church and the building. The Coolidge's longtime housekeeper, Aurora Pierce, had a cousin Willie Pierce who, along with two others, re-worked the interior of the church using a style called carpenter gothic. Willie's design looks most unique today, but simpler versions from the late nineteenth century abound. His approach was to panel the entire interior in match stick siding which he installed at an interesting angle rather than straight up and down as is so often seen.

Carrie Brown Coolidge, Calvin's stepmother, was one of those indomitable women who staged bean suppers, fairs and

the myriad fundraisers, used even to this day, to raise the money to pay for this special interior work. Carrie also played the organ in the church. Nor is our story over. In 1999, Willie Pierce's daughter Marjorie, who had always taken pride in Willie's work and especially the Union Christian Church, died at age 97. Her pride was evidenced in a \$25,000 bequest to the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation. Appropriately enough, the foundation voted to use the money for the upkeep of the church.

*Kathy Wendling*



## An Important Web Presence

I first learned of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation from a New England friend. That was back in the early 1970s when I first became seriously interested in Mr. Coolidge. If it had not been for that friend, years might well have passed before I discovered the Foundation, nestled away among the Green Mountains of Vermont.

Today, all this has changed. The Foundation is no longer hidden away, known only to a few New Englanders. Through the magic of the Internet—a new social force of enormous power, as Mr. Coolidge might put it—our Foundation is now instantaneously accessible to any one, anywhere, any time with a press of the enter button. What a wonder! What an opportunity! What a blessing for our organization!

Our presence on the world wide web is opening new vistas for us, and this, in turn, is profoundly changing the nature of our organization. Our world is no longer confined to the geographical site of Plymouth Notch. We are now free to look beyond the Family Home, the Church, Store and Cheese Factory, and the history of Calvin's boyhood and the moving events of August 3rd. We can, through our website, address Calvin Coolidge in all aspects of his life and career, drawing upon printed, visual, and even audio materials. We are limited only by our imagination—and by the task of compiling the information for input. We are becoming more like a traditional Presidential Library in our concerns and in the information we provide on the 30th President.

The Foundation has gained a new and powerful ally in the Internet. Our website opens a new world to us. It offers us an unparalleled opportunity to reach out to a whole new segment of the population, especially the young, and to grow and diversify our membership. Mr. Coolidge, I think, would be pleased.

*Jerry L. Wallace*

**PRESIDENT CALVIN COOLIDGE STATE HISTORIC SITE**  
**2003 SEASON: MAY 24 – OCTOBER 19, 9:30 AM – 5:00 PM, DAILY**

*A report by Bill Jenney, Site Administrator*

The 2003 season is underway, and the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation has been busy with exhibitions, special events, and capital building projects.

A new exhibit, "*Vermont Is A State I Love*," opened at the Visitor Center Museum on May 24 and will remain on view through October 19. Inspired by the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Calvin Coolidge's famous "Vermont" speech, this exhibition explores the state's influence on the psyche and mystique of the 30<sup>th</sup> U.S. President. The objects on display are from the Division's permanent collection, and they illustrate, along with period photographs and reminiscences, the admiration that was shared by Coolidge and "the people of this brave little state of Vermont."

A highlight of Memorial Day weekend in Vermont is the Vermont Craft Council's annual *Open Studio Weekend*. As part of this statewide event, several artisans temporarily relocated their studios to the President Coolidge site. We are pleased to report that these talented folks - Irene Ames (baskets), Carolyn Guest (ornamental paper cutting & silhouettes), Toby Schwartz (glass carving & etching), and Carol Collins (spinning) will be participating in our other events this season.

The site's first botanical walk, "*The Flora of the Notch*," was held on June 4. Bob Popp, botanist for the Non-Game and Natural Heritage Program at the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, offered a unique glimpse into the world of young Cal Coolidge. Bob led a group of 15 plant enthusiasts through the old farm pastures, wetlands, and forests that surround the village, and more than a few unusual botanical species were identified.

Several hundred people once again journeyed to Plymouth Notch for the *President Calvin Coolidge Birthday Celebration* on July 4. The simple and dignified ceremony began with a march from the village green to the cemetery where a wreath from the White House was laid at the President's gravesite. A chicken barbecue followed at the Wilder House Restaurant, and the Baasch Family Musicians gave a delightful performance at the church. Our thanks to the Coolidge Foundation for organizing much of this event.

And still to come...

The reconstruction of the Wilder Horse Barn is rapidly nearing completion. The project is an authentic recreation of the only major structure missing from the historic village and is funded by an "enhancement grant" from the U.S. Department of Transportation and a state capital appropriation. The site's collection of horse-drawn vehicles will be displayed on the main floor, and the basement level will be a sheltered picnic area with rest rooms. The grand opening is scheduled for late July. Also opening at that time is a major permanent exhibition in the adjacent Wilder Barn. Featuring the site's premier collection of early agricultural equipment, "*From Break of Day 'til Twilight: Farm Life in Plymouth Notch*" will examine Vermont farm life at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Plymouth Old Home Day* on August 2 promises to be bigger and better than ever! The public is invited to join the Plymouth town organizations for a traditional "Old Home Day" with performances by Jim Cooke (as Calvin Coolidge), Jim Getty (as Abraham Lincoln) and Kathryn Woods (as Sojourner Truth), sheep shearing, demonstrations by the Green Mountain Blacksmith Association and other Vermont artisans, wagon rides, chicken barbecue, children's activities, and more.

And mark your calendar for other special events in 2003: *Plymouth Cheese & Harvest Festival* on September 20 (selected by the Vermont Chamber of Commerce as one of the state's "Top Ten Fall Events" in 2001 & 2002) and *Coolidge Christmas Open House* on December 13.

For further information about these and other activities at the President Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site, call 802-672-3773, or visit the Plymouth Notch regional office of the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation at the Aldrich House (directly opposite the Plymouth Post Office). Check out our new and expanded website: [www.HistoricVermont.org](http://www.HistoricVermont.org).

**Enjoy Vermont Life, help Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation!**

*Vermont Life Magazine*, a state owned publication, will help the Coolidge Foundation to raise money with paid subscriptions. Coolidge Foundation members will receive postcards offering a subscription to *Vermont Life* for \$13.95 (a savings of \$2) and for each subscription, \$5 will be donated to CCMF. We thank the management of *Vermont Life* for this opportunity for our members to learn more about Vermont and support us with this donation.

Please call 800-284-3243 and mention the code CPCF03 for this special offer. Credit cards accepted. Renewals extend current subscriptions.

The Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation  
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### **Trips for Students in the Works . . . and A Memorable Trip for the Rest of Us**

Dr. Donald E. Harpster, Educational Coordinator for the Calvin Coolidge Foundation and the President Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site, has been quite active this summer developing guided school tours of the site. These school programs are designed to provide a multi-disciplinary connection to classroom work, standards-based instruction, and hands-on inquiry and problem-solving experiences. Resources for use in the classroom will be distributed to participating teachers prior to the visit. Two fourth grade groups from Ludlow and Mt. Holly elementary schools have participated on a trial basis. The response from teachers and students has been excellent. Preliminary promotional materials were distributed at the Vermont History Expo and the Second Annual Teacher's Institute sponsored by "The Flow of History" grant and the Vermont Alliance for the Social Studies.

Dr. Harpster is Professor of History and Political Science at the College of St. Joseph in Rutland, Vermont. His teaching and research interests include the 1920's in United States History, Vermont History, and the American Presidency.

Teachers K-12 are encouraged to make these new guided tours of the President Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site a part of their curriculum. For further information contact Dr. Donald E. Harpster, Educational Coordinator, Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation and the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, 802-672-3289 or [dharpster@calvin-coolidge.org](mailto:dharpster@calvin-coolidge.org).

Thanks to the success of the 2001 Summer White Houses Tour, the Coolidge Foundation, in cooperation with Historic Windsor, will again treat members and guests to a trip embracing the political past—this time of the East Coast. Tentatively scheduled for August 19-21, 2004, the trip will feature a new itinerary. From Plymouth, VT, we will travel east to the Franklin Pierce Homestead in Hillsborough, NH and Wentworth by the Sea in New Castle, NH, scene of the signing of the Sino-Russian Treaty under Teddy Roosevelt. We will visit Marion Court College (formerly "White Court") in Swampscott, MA, the summer home of Calvin Coolidge in 1925; Quincy, MA, home of John Adams; and the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline, MA, featuring his expansive, restored landscape. We look forward to your company on this time travel journey in 2004.



*Listening to the speakers. A typical Old Home Day scene.*