

# History — the really really fun kind



Sandra Phinney photos

## by Sandra Phinney

The Kings Landing website tag line says, “Getting Here is Easy, Leaving is the Hard Part.” Perhaps that’s why I’ve returned time and time again to this historic village, situated on the storied Saint John Wolostoq River and only 20 minutes from Fredericton, New Brunswick.

My most recent visit was with my husband Barrie, and our six year-old grandchildren, Ellie and Lucy. We arrived during a torrential downpour, but lucky for us, the skies cleared and

it was easy to get around and enjoy the many activities.

The highlight for me was seeing Kings Landing through the eyes of young children. Everything is larger than life – at least larger than seen by our adult eye. For example, when we hitched a ride on the wagon, at one point we stopped at the barn and one of the horses was exchanged for another. One of the children recounted, “It was fun to stick our heads over the side of the wagon to watch, but the wagon was high. It was really really high!”

Later than morning the girls had a romp around a barnyard that was full of large cut out wooden animals they could play with. Lucy recounts, “Ellie pulled me on one the sheep. It was a really big sheep. Really big!”

One of the many features of Kings Landing is that it’s an interactive experience. At one of the homes the women were making clover jelly so the girls were commissioned to pick heads of clover. I loved watching how intent they were on finding clover flowers and gathering them in their small hands. “They were yummy!” Ellie adds. They also had the pleasure of putting them in the pot. When we returned later to see how things worked out, the lady of the house kindly gave the girls a jar to take home.

Kings Landing came about in the late ‘60s when the province constructed the Mactaquac hydroelectric dam. Knowing that the water level of the Saint John River would rise 150 feet, and that several historic homes, stores, and churches would be swallowed by the rising water, the province moved them to this 300-acre site. Now, Kings Landing is a living museum. It houses more 70,000 artifacts and more than 40 interactive exhibits. It also features a village with unique costumed characters, lots of animals, gardens and orchards.

The name “Kings Landing” was chosen to honour a regiment of loyalists in the American Revolution – the Kings American Dragoons – and Landing means a place where boats can tie up on the river. Barrie and I once pulled up at the landing there and tied up the houseboat we were navigating. It’s easy to park a boat below the Prince William Ice Cream Parlour and pay the entrance fee there.

While my husband and grandchildren were busy with other sites, I took part in the Secrets & Taboos tour. By the time the tour was over my head was spinning with information





about the evils of alcohol, how animals had more rights and protection than women and children, ad infinitum, back in the day. It's a wonder they survived. But there were many funny stories, as well as unusual things to see, like the three-seated octagonal outhouse at one of the homes.

Of course the tour also showcases some serious work taking place at Kings Landing, like the creation of The Gordon Gal-

It's heartening to know that this project inspired the formation of the first Black History Society in New Brunswick. This house also continues to be a focal point for school and university students; research is ongoing; and the programs and service offered at Kings Landing continue to grow.

Meanwhile, back at the Axe & Plough Café, Barrie, Ellie and Lucy had no trouble putting away their lunch of burgers



lery (aka the James Gordon House.) It's the first permanent memorial to African American Loyalists in New Brunswick and the first historical house depicting a black family in Atlantic Canada.

I learned that 10 percent of the United Empire Loyalists who arrived in New Brunswick following the American Revolutionary War were African American and that only one in four were slaves; that is, 75 percent were "free," having escaped their masters while in the U.S. However, discrimination in New Brunswick was rampant; while white settlers were granted a minimum of 100 acres to get established, black settlers were only allotted 50 acres, and they had to make improvements on the land within a year or lose the right to keep it.

and fries. When I asked the girls what they thought of lunch, they grinned and gave a hearty thumbs up.

At the day camp offered at Kings Landing, children ages nine to 14 can experience 19th-century life first-hand in the Visiting Cousins program where they dress in period costumes and do everything from milking cows to making meals. Youth ages 12- 15 can sign up for Family Kin, where they focus on a trade or craft such as spinning and weaving, and homemaking, or apprentice with some of the farmers and tradesmen learning the crafts of blacksmithing, printing, and carpentry.

As you can see, this is not a boring or stuffy museum! Kings Landing is history at its best – educational, enlightening and, as Ellie and Lucy would say, "... really really fun!"