

BILLERICA — After being closed since early last year (2020) and completing a huge restoration project, the Billerica Historical Society welcomed visitors back on Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021, to the historic Clara Sexton House.

With funding from a Community Preservation Act grant of \$100,000, the organization restored all the Concord Street house's aging windows and repainted the exterior of the building, along with other repairs and restorations.

"It involved taking (the windows) all out and sending them to a company that restores antique windows and having them all reinstalled again," said Society President John Bartlett. "It's more expensive because you have to do it historically accurately."

Each pane of glass in the 30 or so windows was removed, labeled and restored individually by Sergio Quiroa, of FPP Window Repair, Restoration and Weather Sealing.

On Saturday, members of the Historical Society dressed in historical costumes showed visitors around the home and its new displays. One group put together an apple pie in the house's original 1723 kitchen, placing it in a Dutch oven outside and cooking it on hot bricks and coals. Others demonstrated candle-making techniques or made leather items.

Each room of the house is decorated with artifacts from a different era. In the original kitchen, visitors can see a wool spinning wheel, yarn "weasel" for winding yarn and other textile tools. In the dining room and parlor, intricate Victorian furniture can be seen along with a reed organ, melodeon keyboard and Edison phonograph.

In the newer kitchen, which was added to the structure later, early 20th-century appliances can be seen, including what was most likely the original sink.

Society Vice President Richard Hawes explained that before the American Revolution, homes had a much more plain and utilitarian aesthetic; after the United States was established as its own country, styles evolved to be brighter and more decorative. He said that the displays were meant to show how the rooms looked during each time-period, for the people who lived there.

"You can see within a few steps how life changes through the periods," Hawes said of the new addition to the typical rooms found in any house, the Clara Sexton House has an addition which was used as a doctor's office. There, visitors can see an original examination table, a doctor's ledger containing patient information and cabinets of medical implements and medicine.

Another main attraction is a board hanging on the wall in the kitchen, which is full of bullet holes. Bartlett explained that the board came from a nearby garrison house, a building that was fortified against attacks and served as a shelter for nearby residents. He said that the Historical Society is currently investigating the history of the board,

which may be the oldest existing evidence of an attack by Native Americans in the country.

In addition to the exterior improvements and new displays, many of the interior sections of the house were painted with historically accurate colors. Another grant of \$40,000 secured by state Rep. Marc Lombardo, R-Billerica, has allowed the society to purchase a new security system and new computers to use for cataloging its collection of artifacts.

“We tell a chronological story of the history of Billerica, but it’s common to a lot of towns around here,” Hawes said.