



Good Ol' Days 2009 Puttin' On the Dog



Everyone has heard the expression that “dog is man’s best friend” but have you ever heard the expression “putting on the dog”? This weekend you will discover the meaning of that phrase and much more as Fort Scott “puts on the dog” to celebrate Good Ol’ Days weekend.



Queen Victoria in 1842

The phrase “puttin’ on the dog” originated in the mid nineteenth century, and may have reference to the fact that women of high social standing, including Queen Victoria, would have small dogs on their laps, as a symbol of status. They would also often carry small dogs in the sleeves of their coats in order to show them off.

The phrase came to mean showing wealth or status. At Fort Scott in the 1840s, officers and their wives resided at the top of the social scale. While not quite as fancy as the queen of England, they had their own ways to “put on the dog.” The ways in which they did so will be the focus of this weekend’s events.

“Duck shooting and wolf chasing are the only things that at all reconcile him to the place”

Captain Thomas Swords, Nov. 10th, 1844, (writing about Captain Burdette Terrett)

“Hunting Mad”



A literal way that officers ‘put on the dog’ was through the use of the dog for sport. One of their favorite pastimes was hunting. Officers commented about the many fine hunting opportunities that the area surrounding Fort Scott provided. One officer wrote that “everybody at Fort Scott is hunting mad. Hunting dominates their thoughts night and day”. Even the women occasionally took advantage of this pastime. An officer’s wife penned that she kept her “bow and arrow ready strung for the first unfortunate Buffalo that makes his appearance at Scott.”

To commemorate this pastime, the site will feature many programs and exhibits on hunting and the outdoors including a taxidermy exhibit, a gun display, a fur traders’ camp, and an interpretive program on hunting at Fort Scott. Just off the fort grounds, Dock Dogs will be running dock jumping contests for dogs of all ages. Using dogs in sport is nothing new; officers and their wives at Fort Scott often used dogs to assist them in hunting. Just like the Dock Dogs, dogs at Fort Scott might have ended up in the water as they flushed out ducks and other waterfowl.

"A String of Gossip"



Officers' wives 'put on the dog' in other ways: through dressing in their finest clothing, through refined entertainments, and through other activities befitting ladies of their status.

Activities which will be presented at Fort Scott this weekend include demonstration of period crafts (such as tatting, embroidery, and crochet) and a Victorian fashion show that will highlight women's wear for a variety of leisure activities.

Officers' wives showed their penchant for literary talents through reading and letter writing as will be reflected in the program titled "The Tongue is More Useful than the Arrow". Often these letters contained "a string of gossip" relating to society on post.

A presentation on flora and fauna at Fort Scott will relate to the officers' wives pastime of gathering and pressing flowers. Other programs will address Victorian customs and etiquette and the language of the fan, a refined form of communication used by the upper class women of the time.

"...Our time is mostly passed in reading...and then when our books become irksome, we ride, fish, and walk, collect all the pretty flowers and try to become botanists..."

Charlotte Swords, August 7th, 1843

Clearing "the Cobwebs"

Many forms of entertainment were enjoyed by both officers and their wives. Dancing was actually enjoyed by the entire garrison, not just the officer class. A dragoon sergeant (not at Fort Scott) contended that "even the roughest seemed to rise a little higher and to think better of themselves," when they attended a formal ball opened to all personnel.

Horseback riding, while essential to the military, also served as a means of recreation. An 1870s officers' wife (not at Fort Scott) stated that pursuits such as horseback riding furnished "plenty of excitement" and that activities such as these could help remedy those who let "the cobwebs gather in brains and lungs". Demonstrations of period dancing and sidesaddle horseback riding will round out the weekends' activities.

"Sometimes have fine sport-have a very fine country to run over and not the same chance as at Leavenworth for a body to get his neck broken"

Captain Thomas Swords, Nov. 26th, 1842

Schedule of Activities

Join us for all this and more as Fort Scott "puts on the dog" during Good Ol' Days weekend. Here is a complete schedule of events.



Saturday-June 6

- 10:00 a.m. - Language of the Fan: 1840s Leisure Activities
- 11:00 a.m. - "The Tongue is More Useful than the Arrow": Letters of Thomas and Charlotte Swords
- 12:00 p.m. - Flora and Fauna of the Tallgrass
- 1:00 p.m. - Guided Tour
- 2:00 p.m. - "Everybody Here is Hunting Mad": Fort Scott Officers Go Hunting
- 3:00 p.m. - Victorian Fashion Show
- 4:00 p.m. - "Putting Your Best Foot Forward": Victorian Customs and Etiquette

Sunday-June 7

- 11:00 p.m. - "The Tongue is More Useful than the Arrow": Letters of Thomas and Charlotte Swords
- 12:00 p.m. - "Putting Your Best Foot Forward": Victorian Customs and Etiquette
- 1:00 p.m. - Guided Tour
- 2:00 p.m. - Language of the Fan: 1840s Leisure Activities
- 3:00 p.m. - Victorian Fashion Show