

Students take a trip through history

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COVENTRY — Middle school students saw what their lives might have looked like in a historical Coventry house.

The Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society hosted students from the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School at the Paine House yesterday

It has been at least a couple years since they started bringing in the middle school students and there were no plans to stop this year. "We are happy to be doing it again," said Brenda Titus, one of the members who was giving tours to the kids.

There were seven members of the society there to greet kids and lay down the law about not touching or photographing the artifacts. It didn't stop the students from asking questions or finding things that caught their attention.

One of the more popular items with the kids was the "blood paint." Tour guide and society member Pam Chauvin said the paint, found on the inside of a cupboard in the dining room, may have been there for around 300 years without needing to be repainted. She talked to the kids about recycling. People are recycling more now, but in the past they had to recycle "every single thing they had," she told the kids. The paint is made from animal blood.

Some kids couldn't help but want to photograph the clothes in the garment room to show their friends. Chauvin asked them if they knew anyone with waists that small and explained how women used to wear corsets.

The kids especially got a kick out of the chamber pots and chamber pot chairs, she said.

When they invite the kids to the house each year they want to not only "promote history," Titus said,



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Coventry middle school students enjoy their lunch on the Paine House Museum lawn and prepare to enter the house for their annual tour.

but also address the issue of vandalism. The society wants them to know that "this is their place too."

Whether they vandalize the Paine House or a cemetery or

somewhere else, the kids need to know "how much it hurts the community," another member said.

See SOCIETY, Page A-6

Local society helps kids peer into past

Continued from Page A-1

“Who’s going to take care of it when we’re gone,” they asked. Also, they said, because local residents have found so many connections to the items in the house and the history it represents to their very own families the society believes each student could have their own personal connection.

The Paine House was used for a school, an inn — with a tavern in the basement — a boarding house and could have had other uses. The first Coventry town meeting was held in the tavern, Chauvin said.

They recently had their windows completely restored by Keith Farless of Highland Restoration and it was paid for through a grant from the Champlin Foundation. Farless will be the guest at this weekend’s open house.

One student who couldn’t soak it all in during the short tours was excited to invite his parents to bring him back on Saturday. The Paine House will

also host a farmers market on the first Saturday of the month from July to October. There will be tours for the public during the markets and one other day each month.

The Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society was founded in 1945. Members said the “civic” in the name was important because originally the group was involved in helping pass legislation that affected preservation and other issues in western Rhode Island. They currently have around 40 members.

The society applauded the students for being respectful and knowing how to behave in the historical building that is packed full of items that tell the story of many of their ancestors.

The open house will be this Saturday, June 19 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Paine House Museum, 7 Station St., Coventry. There will be tours every 30 minutes and refreshments provided all for a donation of \$5. Visit www.westernrihistory.org for more information.