

Highland County Historical Society celebrates 50th anniversary, Part XXX

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There is a flock of peacocks in the Highland House. They are roosting on the enormous Eastlake sideboard (circa 1875) in the dining room, a grand home for this unique family of birds.

They are rather recent arrivals in the museum having found their eternal home June 17, 2005, apparently just celebrating their 10th anniversary in this amazing place.

The large silver seven-piece tea set with peacock pattern belonged to Lily Morgan (d. 1956) and was presented to the museum by her grandson, Robert L. Hilliard of Lancaster, Pa.

Upon presentation, Mr. Hilliard traced usage of this tea set back five generations to his great-great-grandparents Hawkins and Margaret Thompson of the 18th century.

The sterling set consists of tray and six servers, enormously heavy. The Highland House and grand sideboard are fitting homes for such magnitude. The designs are beautifully and intricately engraved. Member Helen Ford keeps it and all the silver in the museum beautifully polished. It simply gleams.

To view this set is to get a glimpse and feel for not only a privileged and elegant way of life, but for the creativity of the designer and the skill of the maker.

My family – when this set was first used – would not have been in any position to see it, much less use it.

Now, it is available for any of us to view and even touch, thanks to preservers.

Tea came to Great Britain from China prior to 1660 when it was introduced to London coffeehouses. It soon became Britain's number-one drink of the middle and upper classes. It was the temperance drink of choice and gained social acceptance among the aristocracy through Catherine, the bride of Charles II.

In the 1800s, tea became not only the name of the beverage but of a late afternoon light meal around 4 p.m. to ward off hunger between luncheon and dinner, which was served much later. This practice is called high tea. Is tea and a snack then called low tea?



Afternoon tea in high society, for which our tea set was obviously intended, was served with much ceremony and dignity.

Ladies were trained to pour in a precise and elegant manner. Gentlemen must receive with equally decorous manner and style. Gentility was required.

In years past, and surely the future, the HCHS hosts Children's Teas. Perhaps the gentility is not quite the same, but a hint of tradition is preserved.

Preservation is our goal.