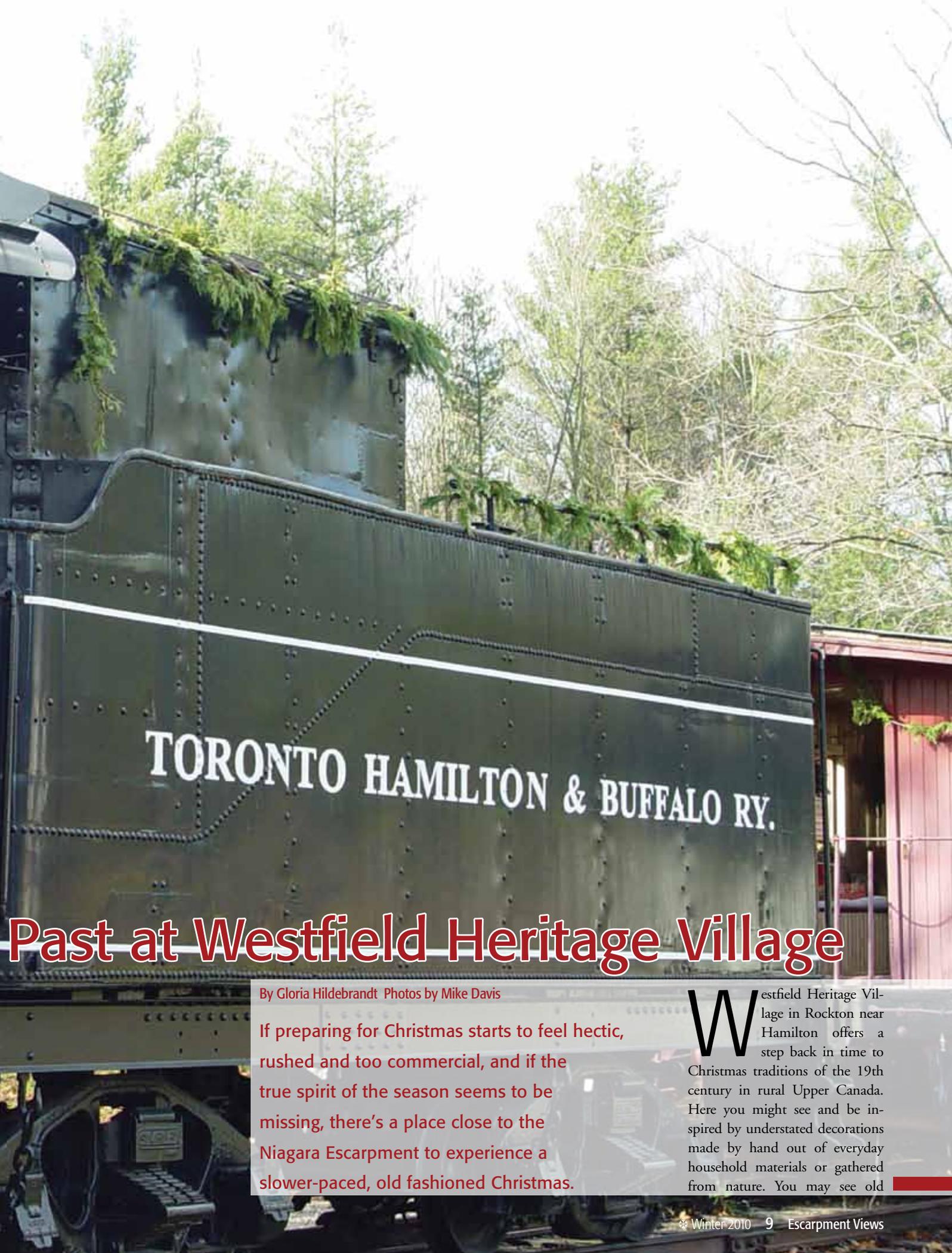




Christmas

This 1910 TH&B Consolidation type steam locomotive at Westfield Heritage Village is one of only two left in the world. Ruby West, Sam Cooper and Dan Sherritt, portraying Father Christmas, check it out.



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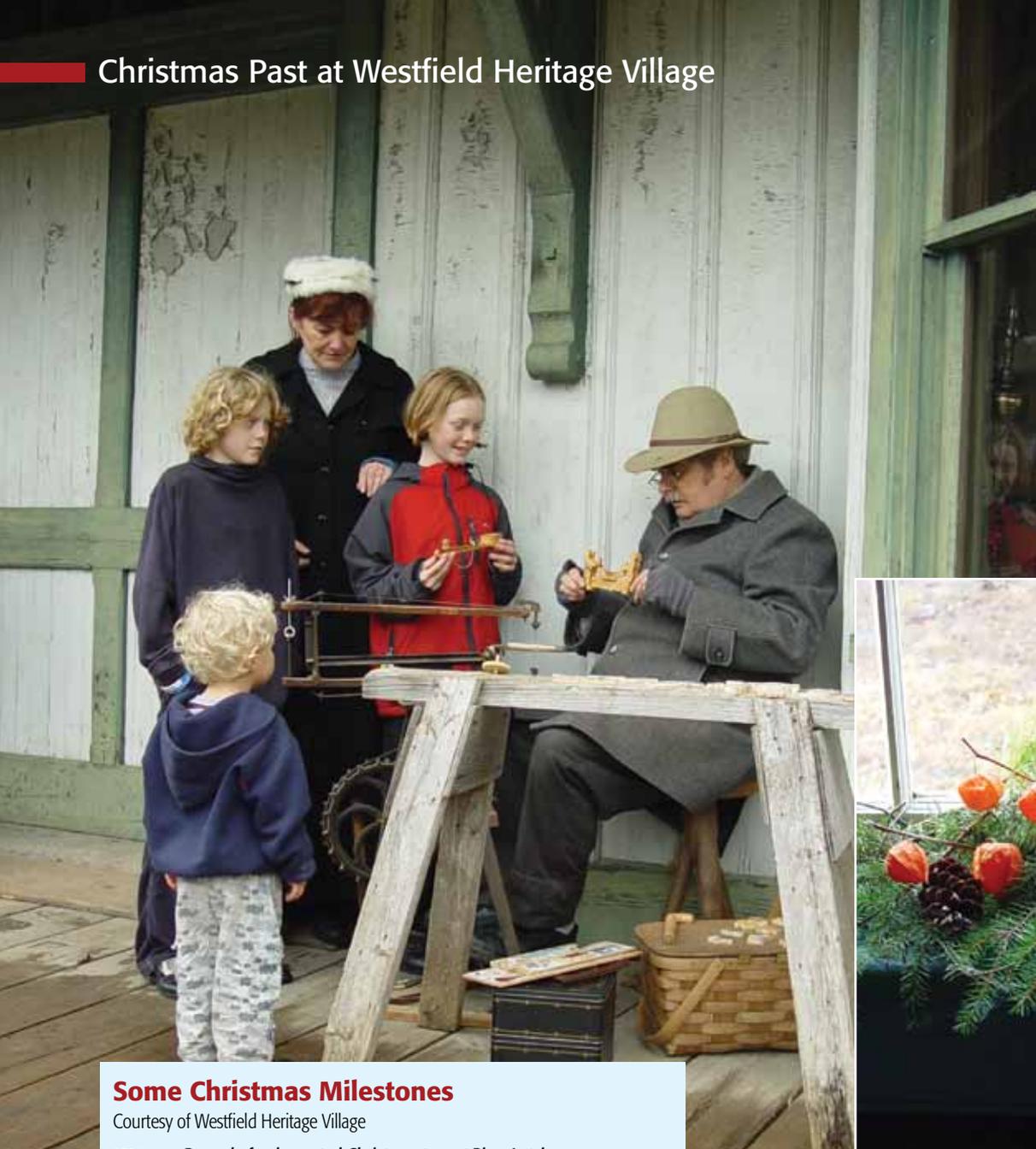
Past at Westfield Heritage Village

By Gloria Hildebrandt Photos by Mike Davis

If preparing for Christmas starts to feel hectic, rushed and too commercial, and if the true spirit of the season seems to be missing, there's a place close to the Niagara Escarpment to experience a slower-paced, old fashioned Christmas.

Westfield Heritage Village in Rockton near Hamilton offers a step back in time to Christmas traditions of the 19th century in rural Upper Canada. Here you might see and be inspired by understated decorations made by hand out of everyday household materials or gathered from nature. You may see old

Christmas Past at Westfield Heritage Village



In Santa's railway car, Matthias Cooper doesn't seem worried at being shown a lump of coal.

Volunteer Gerald Ripley portrays a toymaker of wooden intricacies.



Some Christmas Milestones

Courtesy of Westfield Heritage Village

- 1510 Record of a decorated Christmas tree at Riga, Latvia
- 1610 Tinsel is invented in Germany
- ca. 1660 Record of a Christmas tree lit with candles in Germany
- ca. 1880 Tree ornaments are manufactured in Europe
- 1819 John Lewis Krimmel's sketch of an American family with a Christmas tree on the table is released
- 1822 German merchants living in England are seen with decorated trees in their homes
- 1833 Red pointsettias are sold in Philadelphia
- 1841 Christmas crackers are manufactured in England
- 1843 Charles Dickens writes *A Christmas Carol*
- 1846 *The Illustrated London News* publishes a picture of the British royal family around a Christmas tree, popularizing the table-top tree.
- 1848 *A Visit From Saint Nicholas* by Clement Moore is published. This becomes known as *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*
- 1880 Woolworth's sells German glass ornaments
- 1882 Electric Christmas tree lights are sold in New York
- 1896 Eaton's first Christmas catalogue
- 1939 Robert May creates Rudolf, the red-nosed reindeer as a Christmas promotion for a U.S. department store



Matthias Cooper in a man's hat that's a bit too big.



A careful adjustment makes a difference.



Night, night, sleep tight! Lockhart House contains a bed with strings wound tight for a good sleep.



The kitchen corner in Lockhart House displays some 19th-century domestic necessities.



Natural, simple decorations make for a festive Christmas at Westfield Heritage Village.



Lovingly made by hand: Christmas tree ornaments of wood shavings, wool and ribbon, doilies and clothespins.



Volunteering at Westfield requires dedication.

houses, buildings, windowsills and even the old Toronto, Hamilton and Buffalo steam locomotive decorated with evergreens or other seasonal treasures. Father Christmas in Victorian costume may make an appearance.

Westfield Heritage Village is described as a living history museum. More than 35 historical buildings have been saved from demolition, moved, and carefully restored to form the village. Volunteers dressed in period costume are ready to interpret buildings and their contents, and give demonstrations of bygone activities.

“Westfield is one of the most interesting historical destinations in Ontario,” declares Sarah Gauden of the Hamilton Conservation Authority, which manages the village for the current owner, the City of Hamilton.

How the Village Came to Be

The heritage village was the idea of Glenn Kilmer and Goldie MacDonell, high school teachers in Brantford. In 1960 they bought the land where the village is now located, and eventually rescued the Jerseyville railway station, moving it to become the first building on site. Additional buildings have come from all over southern Ontario.

“Some were moved whole, some were sawn in half and moved in two pieces, and others were dismantled and rebuilt, log by log,” explains Rondalyn Brown, manager of Westfield Heritage Village.

In addition to these historic buildings, there are some authentic reproduction structures. Items donated from the community have created a collection of more than 25,000 artifacts.

The visitors who go to the village are mainly young families and adults over 50, but people of

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all ages can find elements to enjoy, especially at the many special events that are held throughout the year. There are also educational programs that are provided to groups of schoolchildren. Westfield has also set the stage for weddings as well as some films.

Volunteer Life

Westfield is a living history museum in large part due to the dedication of its volunteers who serve as costumed interpreters. There are more than 300 volunteers of all ages and backgrounds.

"We have retired professors, teachers, business people, and ministers," says Janet Knowles, co-ordinator of volunteers. "We also have a large number of youth and junior volunteers. Many of our youth have grown up here at Westfield as their parents came to volunteer. We have a number of families who volunteer together,

and it adds so much to our village life. Our youngest is a babe in arms, and the entire family, parents and five children, are here."

The process of becoming a volunteer at Westfield involves an application, interview, orientation and education on safety and policies, and discussions with interpreters. Volunteers can choose where they would like to spend their time.

"Why do they volunteer?" muses Knowles. "For as many reasons as there are people. Young people start because they need hours, and they love it and stay. Others want to give back something to their community. Others come because a volunteer had such an impact upon them when they were here for the education program as children. Others love history and want to be involved. We care about each other here, and it does become a second family. It's a wonderful place to be, to learn and to give to our visi-

tors whether they be children or adults."

Early Canadian Christmas Traditions

Christmas trees were introduced to Upper Canada by settlers of German descent before Queen Victoria's German husband Prince Albert made them popular in Britain, but they were not practical for the small log cabins of most early Canadians.

Instead, log cabins might have the door decorated with a wreath of evergreens, the fireplace mantle might be hung with a garland, and greenery might be formed into a ball and hung from a rafter. Pine cones, winter berries, nuts, feathers, dried flowers and other treasures from the garden or forest were used as decorations. Stockings were hung on bedposts or the mantle.

Gifts were also simple. Gingerbread, apples and oranges were special treats. Wooden toys were

made by hand. Articles of clothing were often made for Christmas. Talented children made gifts of potpourri, pomander balls, while boys might make wood boxes and girls hemmed handkerchiefs and knitted socks, scarves or mittens.

Christmas cookies and hard candy that was flavoured with peppermint or cherry juice were favourites. Mincemeat pie and plum pudding topped off Christmas dinner, after which simple parlour games might be played. Neighbours and family members would travel to visit each other if weather permitted.

Traditions like these will be displayed and discussed by costumed interpreters at the village. For more information about the special events this December, see www.westfieldheritage.ca or call 519 621 8851 or 1 800 883 0104.

For information about volunteering at Westfield, call Janet Knowles at 519 621 8851.