

Glens Falls' Chapman Museum

Historic portal on the opening of the Adirondacks

by LEE MANCHESTER, Lake Placid News, April 28, 2006

GLENS FALLS — Broadway.
The Albany Post Road.
The State Road.

Over the centuries, the locals gave it many names.

Today, it's known as state Route 9.

From the earliest days of the Adirondack settlement until the opening of the Northway in 1967, Route 9 was the main highway between Manhattan and Montreal, carrying the civilized world along the very edge of the Adirondack wilderness.

Smack dab in the middle of that wilderness highway is Glens Falls.

The Chapman Museum, situated in the DeLong House on Glen Street — Route 9 — serves as a historical window on a critical time in the development of Glens Falls and the opening of the Adirondacks.

Much of the Chapman Museum is the DeLong House, decorated with period furnishings to show what life was like in a 19th century, upper middle class household on the frontier of civilization. Expert guides are available to take you through the house, explaining the artifacts in each room so as to paint a picture of the DeLong household's day.

We were fortunate enough to be guided through the Chapman last week by museum director Tim Weidner.

Family photographs on display in the DeLong House's otherwise empty morning room tell the story of Zopher DeLong, who moved to Glens Falls from Saratoga County in 1860. One of the photos shows DeLong and wife with their eight children, some of whom were already adults by the time the family made its move northward.

DeLong took over an existing hardware business, which did quite well in the booming post-Civil War economy

of the southern Adirondacks. He bought a house on what was then the edge of Glens Falls, renovating the existing frame structure and adding what amounted to a whole new house on the front.

The Chapman Museum was formed in the 1960s, a century after Zopher's relocation to Glens Falls. The house

was a gift to the community from a descendant of the DeLong family.

Parlor. The first of the restored and refurbished rooms of the DeLong House on our tour was the parlor, next to the morning room.

"This was a space that would have been used for formal entertaining,"



Weidner explained. “It was not, however, where the family would have ‘hung out’ — that took place in the library.”

The parlor was where the Victorian custom of “visiting” was played out, giving the DeLong family a chance to show off its status through the room’s furnishings, Weidner said.

“It proved they were ‘good, proper people’ — that’s probably the best way to put it,” he said.

One such proof was provided by the parlor’s “vitrines,” glass cases displaying objects serving to demonstrate the refinement of their owners. The DeLong House parlor contains two vitrines holding arrangements of various stuffed birds.

Bedrooms. Passing through the central entrance hall, Weidner took us upstairs to the DeLong House’s two restored bedrooms.

The DeLong House, Weidner explained, was expanded before running water was available in that part of the city. That meant that each bedroom had to be equipped with both a washstand and a chamber pot.

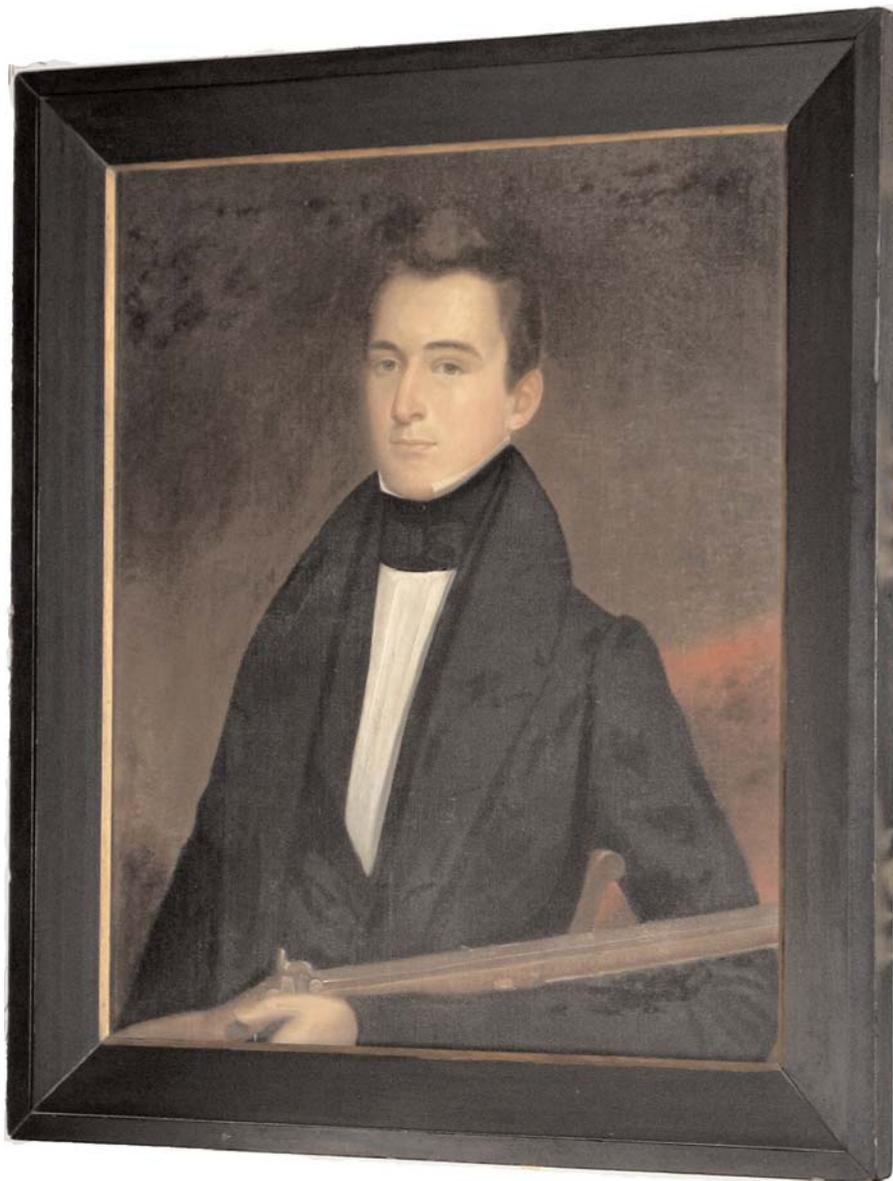
“If it’s in the middle of the winter,” Weidner said, “you don’t feel like going back to the outhouse in the middle of the night.”

Reproduction period clothing was laid out in one bedroom, which kids visiting the museum could try on, if they liked.

“These are a pair of boys’ pants,” Weidner said, holding up a pair of linen slacks. “You’ll notice that they don’t have a zipper; they have buttons, which meant that they were difficult to get into and out of.”

In one of the bedrooms we found a curling iron, fitted in such a way that it could be placed inside the chimney of an oil lamp, where it could be heated. The woman using it had to develop a certain degree of expertise, Weidner said, in judging how hot to heat the iron. Too hot, and her hair would be singed; too cool, and the iron wouldn’t set her curl.

Electricity was not available in Glens Falls until the early years of the 20th century, Weidner said — and then,



A portrait of Zopher DeLong hangs in the DeLong House parlor.

it was first used just for lighting.

One of the two bedrooms at the DeLong House contains only oil lamps and gas lighting fixtures, typical of those that would have been used before electrification. The other bedroom has an electric outlet and lamp, as well as one of the earliest indoor bathrooms in the area.

Library. After going back downstairs, our next stop was in the DeLong’s library.

“This was the ‘hang-out’ room,” Weidner said, “where people would have spent their leisure time. People were avid readers, both of magazines

and books, and there would have been stacks of those things in this room.

“Music was also very popular. It was not uncommon to find a piano like this,” he said, patting a dark brown upright, “as well as other musical instruments in a library of that period. People would play music together — and then recorded music came along with the Victrola, and that was very popular as well.”

Dining room. The final room of the DeLong House tour was the dining room. The dining table was covered in an array of period silverware and china — a much wider array than would be

common today.

“We want people to have an idea of how elaborate the preparations would be for a meal when the family was entertaining friends,” Weidner explained.

Not only did the servants have to know the proper etiquette for setting the table and serving the various courses for such a meal, Weidner said, but the guests had to know what it was all for, too.

“The safest advice,” the museum director said, “was to watch your hostess and do as she did.”

Rotating exhibits. A new gallery attached to the DeLong House contains the Chapman Museum’s rotating exhibits on Glens Falls and regional history.

The newest rotating exhibition, “The Road to Lake George,” will open on May 10.

“It will look at the history of travel from downstate to Lake George,” Weidner said, “all the way from the time of the French and Indian War, when a wagon road was cut through from Fort Edward to Lake George, which they could use for transportation further north; it was a real strategic corridor.

“In the 19th century, it became a route that people used to go to Lake George for summer recreation. People would come by train to Glens Falls. Then they would take a stage coach up to Lake George. If they were staying at a place further up the lake, they would board a steamboat that would carry them to their final destination.

“In the early 20th century,” Weidner continued, “the automobile came along. That introduced another whole wave of people traveling through to Lake George. Since then, there have been an awful lot of people who have traveled up Route 9 to get from the urban areas, down around New York City, to their vacation spots.

“By the 1950s you had the major attractions being built up here — Story Town, Santa’s Workshop, Frontier Town, the Land of Makebelieve — which added a whole new dimension to the trip up Route 9.”

THE CHAPMAN Museum is also home to one of the two most complete collections of the historic regional photography of Glens Falls native Seneca Ray Stoddard. (The other is at the Adirondack Museum, in Blue Mountain Lake.)

The museum’s Research Room, which houses the Stoddard collection, is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 to 4 p.m., or by appointment.

The Chapman Museum is located at 348 Glen Street, Glens Falls. It’s open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. Admission is free.

To get to the Chapman Museum from the Northway (I-87), take Exit 19 and follow the signs toward Glens Falls. Take a right at Route 9 (Glen Street), then drive 1.7 miles. You’ll see the Chapman Museum on your right, at Bacon Street. Turn right and park (free) in the lot behind the museum.

For more information, visit the museum’s Web site at www.ChapmanMuseum.org.

While you’re in Glens Falls

A visit to the Chapman Museum takes about an hour — probably not enough to make it, alone, worth the two-hour drive from Lake Placid. If you would like to engage in a little more “history exploring” while you’re visiting Glens Falls, there’s a brochure you can pick up at the museum’s front desk: the “City of Glens Falls Self-Guided Historical Walking Tour.”

The brochure will stroll you past 26 historically significant architectural sites, starting at the Chapman Museum and ending at the Hyde House, home of a small but world-class art museum featuring works by Degas, Homer, Rembrandt and Van Gogh.

The Hyde Collection museum is open on the same days as the Chapman, but for one hour longer each afternoon, closing at 5 p.m. Like the Chapman, admission to the Hyde is free. For information, visit www.HydeCollection.org on the Web.



The parlor.