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June is wedding season at the Living Heritage Museum

ATHENS, Tenn. (June 24, 2010)—Across the nation, “June brides” are celebrating their nuptials during the most traditionally popular month for weddings. And at the Living Heritage Museum, the Victorian Parlor serves as a charming memorial to courtships of yesteryear.

“During the Victorian Period, gentlemen in their late twenties or early thirties would call on young women in their late teens,” explained Curator of Exhibits Lisa Chastain. “The lady would sit on a couch in the parlor, while her suitor stood. And their conversation was always held under the watchful eye of the young woman’s parents or governess in order to prevent any improper conduct.”

The Museum’s Victorian Parlor exhibit includes many fascinating artifacts, including a grand piano and hand-cranked roller organ and Victrola. Music was an important component to courtship, as a young woman would want to display her musical charms by playing and singing for potential suitors. The Parlor also features the McMinn Family Platter, a purple and white serving dish used in the 1850s by McMinn County’s founding family.

Next to the Victorian Parlor, the Museum’s Vestal Dining Room showcases several exquisite “bride’s baskets.” These intricate glass and silver serving pieces were originally called “berry baskets” and were filled with fruit and given as wedding gifts.

“Victorian courtships and weddings were very formal affairs, especially among the upper classes,” said Chastain, “and the related traditions reflect the serious social and economic implications of marriage in that era. But for contemporary Museum visitors, exploring the Victorian Parlor is pure fun.”

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Founded in 1982, the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum is a private, nonprofit organization housing more than 7,000 artifacts in 30 permanent exhibits that represent the culture and history of Southeast Tennessee from the 1700s to 1940s. The Museum also offers several changing exhibits as well as numerous special events and programs throughout the year and is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information or to make a donation, visit www.livingheritagemuseum.com.

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