

“Hurrah! For the jolly Christmas Tree” – A Victorian Holiday Entrance

Summary: For the Christmas holiday, the Raleigh Garden Club was invited to decorate an historic landmark in downtown Raleigh, the Victorian home of Leonidas L. Polk. The committee used many handmade and traditional decorations supplemented by natural materials from our gardens. The decorations are enjoyed by the public passing by, as well as benefiting the festive spirit for several events held at the Polk House during the holidays.



1- Club members Diane and Bertha tidy up to complete the entrance decoration for the Historic Landmark L.L. Polk House for Christmas

Polk House Background

Leonidas L. Polk was a farmer and helped found what is now NC State University and the NC Dept. of Agriculture. His home was a modest Victorian house built about 1892. It is a fine example of “gingerbread gothic” architecture. The Polk House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is on the Raleigh Heritage Trail.

Objectives of the Project

The main goal is bringing the holiday spirit to a public and historic building in downtown Raleigh for all to enjoy. The Christmas walking tours of downtown are most effective if all the buildings are decorated. This we definitely accomplished with the extensive garlanding of the large porch, the ten-foot-tall tree and the large planters at each side of the entrance’s magnificent magnolia wreath.

A second goal is educating our members on the Christmas decorating traditions of the Victorian era. The Victorians created Christmas decorating as we know it – from Christmas cards to the decorated tree. They used their imagination and things found in nature to decorate their trees. It inspires us to re-connect with our natural world meeting an objective our garden club holds dear. Besides... it was fun and inspiring to keep our decorating traditions alive.



2- The entrance to the Polk House -- all dressed up for a Victorian style Christmas.

Planning and Participation

A chair appointed by the Club President for the project does all the planning with the Board of the Polk House Foundation. A large stash of decorations is owned and stored by the Polk House, and all the fresh material was brought from our gardens. There was therefore no need of a financial contribution. The planning consisted of setting up work dates, organizing into teams, and coordinating the removal of desired items from storage. A bow tying class was organized in October for our members to ensure our garlands would “pop” from the street with their big bows.

On a day in late November, 14 members converged on the site. It was felt that 14 was the largest number the wraparound porch and entrance could comfortably handle, given the social distancing precautions in effect for the ongoing pandemic.

Our committee worked like Christmas elves to transform the lovely home into a holiday spectacle by festooning the porch railings with garland and trimming a Christmas tree at either end of the porch. The front door entrance was emphasized with a lush magnolia wreath, and the urns filled with greenery and hydrangea from member gardens. In six hours, everything was set up and we stood back to enjoy our handiwork.



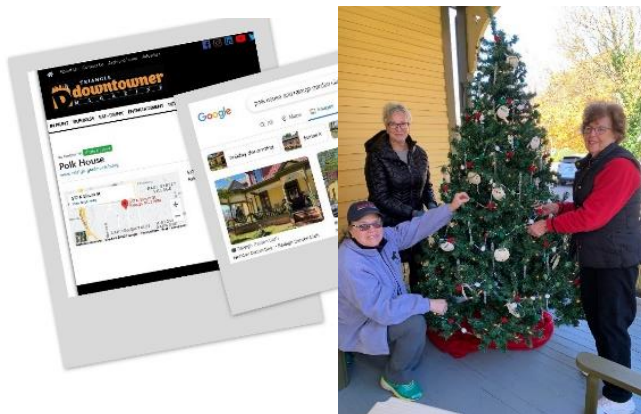
3- The decorated tree with handmade ornaments in the spirit of Victorian times (closeup on the right), and Diane learning the art of tying bows in a special workshop to prepare for the big day.

Conclusion and evaluation of goals

One great benefit of our entrance decoration is the smiles on the faces of the guests for the Christmas Teas held at the Polk house. These are done each week in December and girls ages 5 – 12 are invited to tour the house and bring their favorite doll to enjoy an American Girl Doll Christmas Tea Party.

The Club got some publicity in a local magazine and on a Google search. The true benefit of decorating this historic and public downtown home is the way it epitomized the value of garden club: fulfilling the goals of the Garden Club of NC and the Raleigh Garden Club by beautifying our communities and celebrating our garden traditions. It also engaged new members with the older veterans to celebrate the holiday season with the natural bounty from our gardens.

We heard from two members that participated in the Historic Oakwood Christmas tour that the house looked wonderful on the tour. The Board of the Polk Foundation was very enthusiastic about the look of the entrance. The Chair and members were proud of their work and stood to a round of applause at the December Club meeting when a photo of the entrance was shown on the presentation screen for all to see. It was a lot of fun and we succeeded in raising the spirit of the holiday season for all.



Pinned post

Historic Polk House

October 15

CHRISTMAS TEAS

Let your daughter (ages 5-12) visit the Historic Polk House and bring her favorite doll and enjoy an American Girl Doll Christmas Tea Party. We will be making a Christmas craft and having creative time with the dolls.

Join us for a morning or afternoon of fun with a favorite doll in the beautiful Historic Polk House. Besides making a Christmas craft for the dolls, the girls will be enjoying punch and cookies, and having a creative time together. For registration information email LLPolkhouse2@gmail.com

Dates: Saturday, December 3 @ 10-noon or 2-4
 Sunday, December 4 @ 2:30-4:30 FULL
 Saturday, December 10 @ 10-noon or 2-4
 Sunday, December 11 @ 2:30-4:30
 Saturday, December 17 @ 10-noon or 2-4
 Sunday, December 18 @ 2:30-4:30

Cost: \$28

4 Some publicity and members of the team at work, including the Chair Mary Lynn Whitley (in the blue jacket).