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Living History

Nov. 4, 2011

Hannah Johnson in the dining room of the David Davis Mansion.

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Hannah Johnson '12, a senior history major at Illinois Wesleyan University, has dedicated nearly 100 hours this semester to her public history internship, culminating with "A Bountiful Feast." The Thanksgiving-themed event will take place on Saturday, Nov. 5 and Sunday, Nov. 6 at the David Davis Mansion located at 1000 Monroe Dr. in Bloomington.

When the chance to become an intern at the mansion presented itself, Johnson was immediately drawn to it. "I saw it as an opportunity to come full circle," she said.

A native of Bloomington, Johnson who grew up near the historic home, developed an appreciation for history and often enjoyed the educational programs offered at the mansion.

The David Davis Mansion, also known as Clover Lawn, was the home of Judge David Davis and his wife, Sarah. Davis, among other honors, was appointed by Abraham Lincoln to the United Supreme Court in 1862 and was a trustee of Illinois Wesleyan during the 1850s. The mansion, completed in 1872, reflects the mid-Victoria lifestyle. The home is open to tours year-round and features educational programs, such as Dave & Abe's Great Adventure and Snap Apple. The Thanksgiving tour, "A Bountiful Feast," is unique because it will be given from the servants' perspectives and "brings a dramatic element to public history, which truly makes it living history," said Johnson.

Hannah Johnson does research at the David Davis Mansion.

According to Johnson, the internship at the Davis David Mansion has allowed her to "infuse personality into history" and to gain invaluable research experience. "I was fortunate enough to have access to the research that a previous intern from IWU had conducted," she said, "but I also had to spend time familiarizing myself with texts that the mansion's servants or Sarah Davis would have read." Based on her research, Johnson helped revise the script that will be used during this weekend's event. She also helped add to the museum's inventory of practical props through internet-based research.

Johnson is one of many Illinois Wesleyan students to have had the opportunity to include the David Davis Mansion on their resumes. Dr. Marcia Young, the site superintendent, has been with the organization for more than 20 years. "We had an intern working at the mansion my first year here," Young recalled, adding "we have had a good partnership with Illinois Wesleyan."

This ongoing partnership has allowed Johnson to fuse her study of history and passion for theatre. According to Johnson, she has always been interested in theatre performance as well. Her parents, Debra (Holmberg) Johnson '88 and Kenneth

P. Johnson ’89, majored in acting at Illinois Wesleyan. Johnson said, “my internship at the David Davis Mansion has truly demonstrated that a career in public history can touch upon my various interests in history, theatre and management.”

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