

DNR photo by Tom Uhlenbrock

A WINTER'S DAY AT MISSOURI'S HISTORIC HOMES

by Tom Uhlenbrock

Three grand mansions are among Missouri's 87 state parks and historic sites, and each makes for a great way to while away a winter's day. Tours take about an hour and explore the nooks and crannies, revealing secrets about their famous residents.

The homes contain furniture, clothing and other personal possessions, looking as if their long-gone owners had merely stepped out for the day.

HUNTER-DAWSON STATE HISTORIC SITE is in New Madrid on the Mississippi River at the southeast tip of Missouri. The home is an architectural gem with the Georgian, Greek Revival and Italianate elements that were popular in homes of the Old South. The 15-room house has seven bedrooms and nine fireplaces.

William Hunter, a successful dry goods dealer, had the house built in 1859-1860. Today, it contains a museum-quality collection of antique furniture that reflects the wealth of a Missouri family prior to the Civil War.

"Visitors get a real insight into how this particular family lived, and an insight into the Southern culture," said Michael Comer, natural resource manager of the site.

BOTHWELL LODGE STATE HISTORIC SITE is perched like a stone castle on a bluff north of Sedalia off Highway 65. It was built by John Homer Bothwell, who died in 1929 at the age of 80.

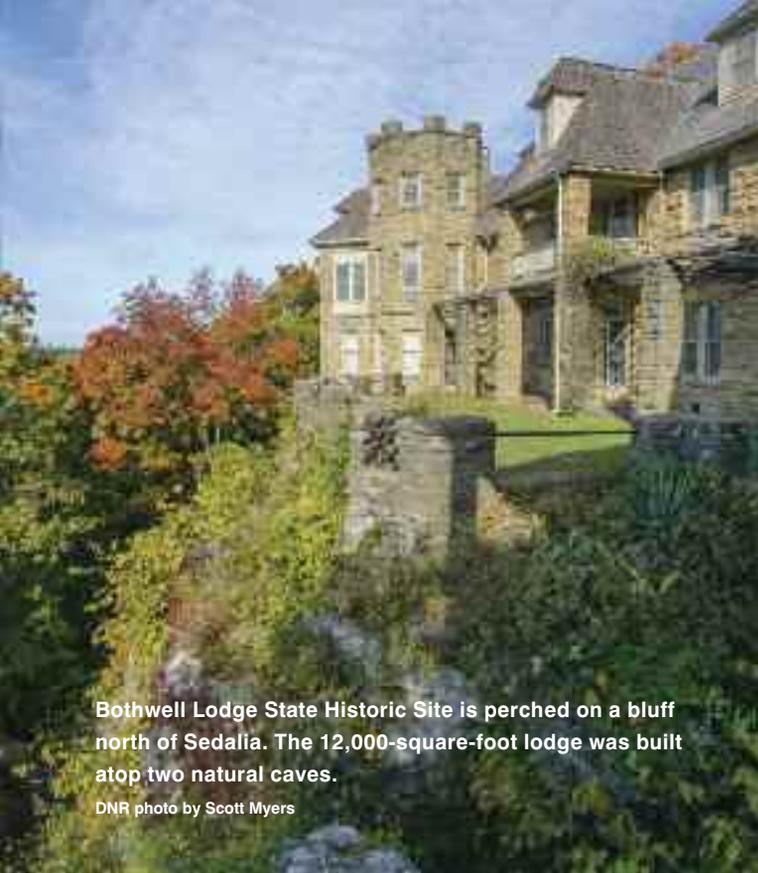
"Bothwell was a very prominent citizen of Sedalia," said Marissa Cowen, natural resource manager of the historic site. "He was a lawyer, politician, businessman and philanthropist. His dedication to the community and state of Missouri was genuine."

The Arts-and-Crafts style house sits on a bluff 120 feet above the surrounding countryside. It features a turret, and was built in four phases, the last completed in 1928. The house had five and a half bathrooms at a time when most Missourians still used outhouses.

Bothwell's wife of two years died after giving birth to a stillborn child. He never remarried nor had another child, but was well traveled, well read and filled the home's 10 guest bedrooms with friends and relatives nearly every weekend.

"He was a very active, very positive person," Cowen said. "Some of the neater things in the house are the souvenirs he picked up from the various places he traveled."

Cowen said many visitors come for the autumn colors in



Bothwell Lodge State Historic Site is perched on a bluff north of Sedalia. The 12,000-square-foot lodge was built atop two natural caves.

DNR photo by Scott Myers

fall and after a snow in winter to hike the trails that are part of the historic site.

THOMAS HART BENTON HOME AND STUDIO STATE HISTORIC SITE in the Westport area of Kansas City contains the personal belongings of one of Missouri's premier artists, his wife of 52 years, Rita Piacenza and the couples' two children.

Benton converted the carriage house at the rear of the four-bedroom home into a studio. He worked there nearly



(Opposite page) Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site contains a museum-quality collection of antique furniture. Descendants of the Hunter family occupied the house until 1958. In 1966, the city of New Madrid bought the house and donated it to the state a year later.

(Top right) A tour group visits Bothwell Lodge State Historic Site, which was built by John Homer Bothwell, a prominent lawyer of Sedalia. **(Left) The studio at Thomas Hart Benton Home and Studio State Historic Site is preserved as it was when the artist died there in 1975.**

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every day and died there on Jan. 19, 1975, at the age of 85. Rita died 11 weeks later. The studio displays paints, brushes and a stretched canvas, as if waiting for the artist's return.

The home contains 13 original Benton paintings, lithographs and sculptures.

"During tours, we talk a lot about his artwork, but also about his personality, his lifestyle, his work habits – you really get a sense of who he was," said Steve Sitton, site administrator. "We have his books, his paints, his clothes. Definitely, the favorite stop on the tour is his studio."

During the holiday season, the house is decorated with a tree hung with some of the Benton's ornaments. There also is a display of Christmas cards sent by the Bentons.

"He would take one of his paintings and use that as the front of the card," Sitton said. "We have about a dozen on display."

Many Missouri state historic sites have modified hours of operation and tour schedules during the winter months. For information on hours and admission at state historic sites, visit mostateparks.com.



Tom Uhlenbrock is a writer for Missouri State Parks, a division of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.