

## Teacher's Guide: Montauk

### Goal

Through an on-site visit or through slides the student will experience the atmosphere of Montauk as a Victorian residence and understand William Larrabee's role in Iowa history.

### Objectives

- Identify William Larrabee as an Iowa governor and progressive reformer
- Look at the following aspects of Montauk: buildings and architecture, material culture, and the natural areas surrounding the site
- Understand that while Montauk is a large elegant home, it is still rather modest, considering Governor Larrabee's social and economic status
- Identify other Clermont sites: The Union Sunday School, the Clermont Museum, and the Larrabee's social and economic status
- Develop an understanding of what daily life was like on an Iowa farm in the late 1800s

## Site Summary

### William Larrabee

Born in Connecticut in 1832, William Larrabee moved to Iowa at the age of 21. He had little formal education, only completing the eighth grade. However, he was a lifelong self-learner. He worked as a teacher before becoming involved in land speculation.

Eventually, he held business interests in banking, railroad, and coal industries. His public service began in 1867. He served 17 years in the Iowa legislature, then two terms as governor, from 1886 to 1890. Larrabee's progressive ideas put him at odds with his fellow Republican Party members. Among the causes he championed were woman suffrage, railroad regulations, and African-American rights. He held strong views on education, believing in tax-supported education for all students, and advocating the use of artifacts in the classroom. At the time of his death in 1912, he was in the process of building the Larrabee School, which housed a museum until 1970.

### The Larrabee Family

Anna Matilda Appelman married William Larrabee in Iowa in 1861, the same year Abraham Lincoln became president. They raised seven children: Charles, Julia, Anna, William Jr., Augusta, Frederic, and Helen -the youngest and only child born at Montauk. The Larrabees moved into Montauk in 1874.

Mrs. Larrabee became very active in the community of Clermont, serving as the superintendent of the Union Sunday School for 30 years, and completing the Larrabee School following her husband's death.

The Larrabee children were also involved in a variety of activities suited to their upper-class social and economic status. The girls engaged in the arts, one of the few pastimes considered suitable for females at that time. Anna became an accomplished musician, Augusta an artist. The boys became involved in the family businesses and two served in the legislature. Reflecting their father's concern for education, all of the Larrabee children stayed in Iowa; two of them, Anna and William Jr., remained in Clermont. Anna lived at Montauk until her death in 1965. With Helen's three children raised at the mansion following her death, Montauk was home to three generations of the Larrabee family.

## Montauk

Built in 1874 on a hill overlooking the Turkey River Valley, Montauk was named by Mrs. Larrabee for the lighthouse at the eastern end of Long Island that guided her sea-captain father home from his whaling voyages. A widow's walk, like those used by the wives of sea captains to watch for ships, crowns the roof and gives a dramatic view of the Turkey Valley.

Surrounded by over 100,000 pine trees that Larrabee planted, the 14-room mansion is built of brick molded of native clay and kiln at Clermont. On the 46-acre grounds, where once peacocks strutted and turkeys roosted in the trees at night, are flower gardens and statues of Civil War heroes. Montauk was also a working farm with barns, farm animals, an orchard, and grain fields.

Montauk reflects the wealth and lofty status of its occupants. Larrabee traveled widely and decorated his home with curios and souvenirs. Visitors today can see Tiffany lamps, Wedgewood china, statues from Italy, music boxes from Switzerland, a large collection of paintings, and thousands of books. Each room has a marble sink, and most of the rooms are filled with paintings, marble busts, and statues.

Still, Montauk is modest compared to the homes of other similarly prominent leaders of Iowa and the nation. This simplicity is a product of the Larrabees' conservative New England background.

Because the house was lived in continuously for nearly one hundred years, the furnishings and appliances reflect changes in technology and style over time. Newer furnishings mix with older ones: in the kitchen, for example, a 1900 wood stove stands near a 1950s dishwasher. The Larrabee family was progressive in its use of technology. The house was built with central heat, a recent innovation at that time. Other new conveniences were added as soon as they were available - the telephone in 1900, and electricity in 1910.

## Vocabulary

**Land Speculation:** To buy or sell land in expectation of profiting from market fluctuations.

**Library:** Room in a house comparable to today's home office or study.

**Montauk:** The name of the house comes from the Montauk Point Lighthouse in New York, reflecting the Larrabees' New England roots.

**Progressive:** A person who actively favors or strives for progress toward better conditions, as in society or government.

**Prohibition:** To limit or forbid the manufacture and consumption of alcoholic beverages. This was a popular cause in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Sitting Room:** Comparable to today's living room.

**Suffrage:** The right to vote. When Larrabee was first in public office many groups, including women, African Americans, and American Indians were denied the right to vote.

**Victorian:** A highly ornamented, massive style of architecture, decor, and furnishings popular during the reign (1830-1900) of England's Queen Victoria; or, relating to or displaying the standards or ideals of morality regarding as characteristic of this time.

## Pre-Visit Activities

First talk about Montauk as a museum with collections. Explain that a collection is a group of items assembled in a logical order and gathered because they have some kind of significance. Museums have collections that are studied and exhibited to the public. The collections are used to interpret the past, present, and sometimes the future.

Explain that museums use both two dimensional and three-dimensional materials (called artifacts) to interpret history. An artifact can tell us much about the people, the time, and the region from which it came. It reveals what materials it is made from, when and where it was made, and how it was used. Sometimes its color and style tell us about popular trends. All of this helps us determine its relative value within the "material culture."

## Discussion Questions

A historic site - such as Montauk - is one type of museum that focuses on a specific place, person, or event. What places in your town or county would you make into historic sites? Make a list of these places and the persons, places, or events they represent. Discuss what you expect to see in a house owned by a former Iowa governor.

## On-Site Activities

Include these activities when you visit Montauk:

- Montauk has a parklike setting, common to Victorian houses. Look at the outdoor statuary of Civil War heroes.
- Identify the outbuildings. You will find the well house, laundry room, ice house, shop, and farm buildings.

- Take a drive through Clermont or look at slides. Visit the 1863 Union Sunday School, which houses the Kimball pipe organ that William Larrabee donated in 1896. See the Larrabee School, constructed entirely of stone, brick, and marble. Larrabee built it in 1912 to further his progressive views of education.
- Stop in front of the Clermont Museum, which now contains the collection that Larrabee acquired for use in the Larrabee School. He believed that children should have the opportunity to learn "hands-on" from artifacts as well as textbooks.

## Post-Visit Activities

Discuss the following questions with your students after "touring" Montauk. After each question we give some suggested answers. Have your students expand on these answers.

- William Larrabee supported woman suffrage (giving women the right to vote). Imagine you are living in 1880s. Women cannot vote in any elections. Debate the issue of giving women voting rights. How might it change elections? How might it change women?
- Montauk was lived in for almost one hundred years - from the 1870s to 1960s. Consequently, the home reflects various eras of technology. What changes in technology did you see on your visit? (Consider: electric lights, dishwasher, telephone.)
- Houses change regularly to fit the needs and tastes of their owners. If you were living in Montauk, what changes would you make to suit you and your family? Consider, for example, making the music room into a TV room.)
- William Larrabee was considered progressive in his ideas. Some of the political issues he dealt with were public education, prohibition (outlawing alcoholic beverages), women suffrage, railroad rates, civil rights, and union rights. What issues do today's governor and legislature deal with? How are they similar and different from the issues Larrabee faced? (Consider: gambling, which is similar to prohibition issue.)

## Extensions and Adaptations

Here are suggested themes for student research. Their results might be presented in both written and oral reports.

- William Larrabee kept up a lifelong correspondence with several noted people of his time. These included William Jennings Bryan, William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, and James Harlan. Choose one of these people to learn more about. What was his childhood like? How did he become a public figure? Were his ideas similar to Larrabee's? Pair up with a friend and pretend to be Larrabee and one of his correspondents. Exchange letters about your views.
- The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Expo in St. Louis was a very popular event. Larrabee was the president of the Iowa Commission to the Expo. Find out more about the Expo (also known as the 1904 World's Fair). When did it take place?

What kinds of competitions and exhibits were held? How did Iowa participate? (Start by gathering information at the public library, which may provide leads to further information.)

- Much of what we know about the Larrabee family comes from family history. Your family has a history, too. Talk to your parents and other family history. Find out when your family moved to Iowa. Who came first? Where did they live? What occupations did they hold? What kinds of family stories do you tell? Be sure to write all this down, even if you and your mom and dad were the first family members to come to Iowa. Someday someone else in your family will want to know this bit of history.
- At Montauk you saw some of the clothes the Larrabee daughters wore when they were young adults. Fashion has changed a lot since then. Find out more about the changes in clothing and accessories between the 1870s and today. What styles were popular 75, 50 and 25 years ago? How do these styles compare with today's? Which ones would you like to wear?

## Doing History

These activities may be used to further explore ideas presented by your visit. You may want to adjust the activities to the student's interests and abilities.

The Clermont Museum contains the artifacts that were in the museum at the Larrabee School. You can make your own museum, either at home or in the classroom. Decide on a topic for your museum (this is your museum's "mission"). Identify artifacts that will illustrate this topic. Do some research on the artifacts and make labels for them. You can exhibit your museum in the classroom.

- Draw something you remember from your visit. What made you remember it? Write a page about your picture and paste it on the back.
- Imagine you are in music room at Montauk. What music would have been popular when the Larrabee children were young? What music was popular when the Larrabee grandchildren lived there? See if you can find sheet music or recordings of popular music from back then and play them in class. Do you like the music? Do you prefer this music or current music?
- Keeping a scrapbook was a popular pastime for children and adults during the Larrabee's time. Scrapbooks can contain just about anything you want to remember. Some people make scrapbooks about their families, their hobbies, or newspaper articles of interest. Make your own scrapbook. What will you put in it? Share it with your classmates.
- The Larrabees' raised their own children in the 1860s to 1890s, then raised some grandchildren at Montauk after 1900. How do you think ideas about child-rearing changed from one generation to the next? See if you can find out about these changes at your public library. Write and perform a short play comparing how children were raised then with how they are raised today.

## Resources

These materials, available at Montauk or the State Historical Society of Iowa, will help you find out more about Montauk, the Larrabee family and Clermont.

### **Books and articles 4th-8th Grade**

["Doing Local History." The Goldfinch, Vol. 14, No. 2, Winter 1992.](#)

["Government in Iowa." The Goldfinch, Spring 1976.](#)

["Homes in History." The Goldfinch, Vol. 15, No. 1, Fall 1993.](#)

### **Books and Articles: 9th Grade-Adult**

Christian, Rebecca. "Montauk: Baronial Splendor at Clermont," *Iowan* 32 (Winter 1983): 11-16, 52-53.

Knight, Jo Ellen. "Historic Tour of Clermont." *Iowan* 18 (Fall 1969): 32-35, 49.

Shaffer, James L. "Historic Montauk." *Iowan* 16 (Winter 1967-68): 10-19, 53.

"Teaching with Historic Places: Where did History Happen?" *Cultural Resources Management (CRM)* Vol. 16, No. 2, 1993.

Workman, J. Brooke, "Governor William Larrabee and Railroad Reform." *Iowa Journal of History* 57 (1959): 231-66.