

Dr Betty Karol Wilson may be a name you don't know, but she should be up there on the marquee. You see, she's the fun-filled hostess with all the academic credentials to teach you about New Market and the northern Shenandoah Valley of the 19th century. Dr Wilson conducts tours, complete with "quaint and colorful costumes," of New Market that bring history to life and give you reason to go back to the library to read more about the rough and tumble characters and town life of the area, especially during the Civil War and its aftermath.

Although I don't think she's a native of the area, she certainly has jumped into the pond, both deep and shallow ends, of this delightful town and can bring both its wet and dusty history to life as though you were walking the streets (probably a bit muddy then, especially if the rains came as often as they do now) and being invited into the houses that line the active streets.

Garbed in full regalia of the 19th century from top to toe, Dr Wilson delights all who join her in her walking tour. Her sense of humor certainly struck my funny bone, especially when her hooped dress blew up in a sudden gust and I gallantly held it in place. She laughed that the sight of a lady's ankle in that day of our great grandfathers might have driven the local boys to drink, and was most appreciative that I had preserved her honor.

We walked at a leisurely pace from the old church across from the library up to the main drag despite near winter winds which should have been gentle spring breezes back in early April. Dr Wilson stopped at various corners to recount the history of the area--New Market had nothing to do with markets we found out but had a race track and got its name from the English town that was known for its trotters--and showed us either surviving--magnificent church and awe inspiring cemetery--or original architecture of what one saw or bumped into while walking about over 150 years ago. The corner water pumps were a good example of how someone (or someone's horse) who was "deprived" of a fast food joint might quench their thirst.

Most fun was her entertaining tale in the courtyard of one wonderful home that was once the residence of a famous surgeon. In a scene worthy of the Blackfriars players in Staunton, she slipped into the accent and speech pattern of an elderly frontier woman offering remedies to cure warts. It was the part about the eviscerated toad wrapped around the wart that might make some of us more tolerant of lengthy waits in today's medical reception rooms!

Another fun story included a tale of pouring boiling water down from an upstairs window on threatening Yankee soldiers who must have been just off the boat since they were hungry and demanding "Brot" in German. Instead of fresh bread, they got an equivalent of a hot tea shower! We would all have been tempted to explore the underground maze of tunnels that the heroine used in her escape from the less than amused troopers. Alas, her escape passage has long since been filled.

People on the street recognized Dr Wilson and smiled to see her leading another wide-eyed group along to yet another destination.

On that cold day in April when I was tempted to do just about anything other than drive over to New Market and wander the streets on a windy and wet day, I pulled my shoes on and hitched up the Toyota for the trip over the mountain from West Virginia to learn a tad more about the 'hood I call home. ... Thank you Dr Wilson for such an enlightening and fun time.

David Evans