

## MoHiP's *Lion of the West*, September 25

The Society's Missouri History in Performance (MoHiP) Theatre will present James Kirke Paulding's *Lion of the West* at Thespian Hall in Boonville, September 25. Cathy Barton and Dave Para will begin the evening at 7:30 p.m. with music of the period and the performance will start at 8:00 p.m.

In 1831 Paulding—friend of Washington Irving and author in his own right—won a competition for the best play to portray an American character. The play, *Lion of the West*, would undergo many alterations and name changes, but one thing remained: it introduced Colonel Nimrod Wildfire to the American public. Wildfire was based on David Crockett, congressman and frontiersman, and *Lion* became a popular theatrical offering across the country.

Paulding often “borrowed” descriptions and text from other authors, and in the case of the play, Paulding was influenced by Timothy Flint, a minister who lived near St. Charles, Missouri, and who described the characters and the speech of Missourians of the time. Paulding's Kentucky screamer in the form of Wildfire was just as likely influenced by a Missouri boatman.

Not everyone appreciated Paulding's interpretation of the Western character. An English military officer saw *Lion* in 1832 and was impressed by the play, but heard rumors about the response to Wildfire in a St. Louis production:

“I was informed that the effect of his performance in the West was such as to excite a strong feeling against him; and so incensed the ‘half-horse, half-alligator boys,’ the yellow flowers of the forest,’ as they call themselves, that they threatened ‘to row him up Salt River,’ if he ventured a repetition of the objectionable performance.”

*Lion of the West* is a lively, loud, and fast-moving farce complete with backwoods heroes, damsels in distress, and English snobbery. Modern audiences will have a chance to see what Missourians laughed with—and at—onstage in St. Louis, 1832.



## Fun with Art Explorers

Art Curator Joan Stack portrayed Eliza Thomas Bingham, wife of artist George Caleb Bingham, as she guided participants through the Society's Art Gallery on July 11.

The event began as the group packed a suitcase for a trip back to the nineteenth century. Everyone then entered the Bingham Room to discuss how individual pictures provide windows on the past. After naming many of the animals that people in *Watching the Cargo* might have encountered, the kids sorted “Beanie Babies” into native and non-native Missouri species. Participants then examined Bingham's allegorical painting, *The Thread of Life*, and discussed its probable relationship to the birth of his son. This topic led to examining replica baby items from the nineteenth century, and the group enjoyed hands-on experience with replica dolls and money from the period, authentic marbles, and a framed three-dollar bill produced in Missouri during the Civil War. After looking at *Order No. 11*, each participant held an actual Civil War bullet and compared the likeness of President Lincoln on a U.S. penny with Bingham's portrayal of a bust of Lincoln in the background of his portrait of artist Vinnie Ream, the sculptress of the bust. Finally, each child was given a cardboard telescope that they decorated with stickers of animals and objects that might have been seen in Bingham's time. The event ended with a discussion of evening recreation during the 1800s, long before television, computers, or i-pods. Lights were dimmed, and Stack entertained guests with standard nineteenth-century entertainment—storytelling. The happy group went home with goodie bag treats.

