



The Christmas tree inside the Trustees' Building.

# The Gift of Simplicity



**Holidays at Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill combine quiet reflection with family-friendly activities.**

BY RICHARD WARREN

**S**haker Village of Pleasant Hill, 25 miles southwest of Lexington, Kentucky, was once the third largest community of its kind in the country. Today, the site in the heart of Bluegrass Country contains 34 of Pleasant Hill's original 19<sup>th</sup>-century structures.

Visitors in November and December will learn how the Shakers observed the holidays as they take tours and engage in a variety of educational programming. So thoroughly has the village been restored to its original appearance, you may well expect to see Shaker sisters or brothers dashing down the street to perform their holiday duties.

## CHRISTMAS PAST AND PRESENT

According to Dr. Jacob Glover, director of public programs and education at Shaker Village, holiday observances were—not surprisingly—quite simple. Thanksgiving was a day for quiet reflection and prayer, “certainly not a day for feasting and football,” he said, laughing. Likewise, Christmas was peaceful and contemplative, although the community would also engage in a worship service, and in the years when they’d had an abundant harvest, they would share their bounty with the poor.

But between 1805 and 1910, Pleasant Hill Shakers’ holiday observations gradually evolved to incorporate more festive trappings. In later years, residents of the various family dwellings would socialize and even

**The Trustees' Building has a holiday glow during Illuminated Evenings.**



COURTESY SHAKER VILLAGE OF PLEASANT HILL (3)



perform little plays for each other or sing songs they'd composed themselves. By the early 1900s, even Santa Claus was making an appearance in their festivities, Glover said.



**Above: A sumptuous afternoon tea.**

**Below: Holiday glow at Shaker Village.**

So, it's appropriate that today's holiday activities at Shaker Village are a mixture of the original occupants' love for simplicity and contemplation, as well as the more modern merriment to which we're accustomed.

Most activities occur on weekends in December with a program called "Illuminated Evenings" taking place on Dec. 5, 12, and 19 starting at 5 p.m. Festive lights and decorations are strung throughout the village, and a large tree serves as a focal point. Wagon rides, bonfires, refreshments, and music are offered during these events. Craft classes also are on the busy holiday calendar.

Earlier on those same dates, a children's tea with Mrs. Claus and a traditional holiday tea are held inside the Trustees' Building. Once the village's center of government, the building's decorations are highlighted by two 12-foot Christmas trees festooned with ornaments inspired by nature. The trees flank magnificent spiral staircases; for a great photo, climb to the top of the stairs and look down on the trees.

### BOUNTIFUL TABLES AND SHOPS

The onsite restaurant, The Trustees' Table, features seasonal ingredients from the village's garden and local farmers. During the holidays, a popular lunch buffet has been served in the past; this year due to COVID-19, the lunch may be plated for service, but expect comforting dishes like chicken and dumplings, pot roast, herb-roasted chicken, meatloaf, and butternut squash ravioli.

The dinner menu is driven by the year's harvest, but last year's offering included quail. You'll

likely find a Kentucky signature dish, the Hot Brown, which is an open-faced turkey sandwich smothered with mornay sauce and covered with bacon and roasted tomatoes. Village specialties include a casserole made from salsify, a root vegetable popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that was said to taste like oysters. Finish dinner with the restaurant's famous Shaker Lemon Pie that's made with the entire lemon.

Shops at Shaker Village have gift baskets, ornaments, music CDs, toys, and cookbooks. Shaker-specific gifts range from an exquisite writing desk to simpler items like handmade whisk brooms or wooden oval boxes. Want to keep it simple, just like the Shakers? Pick up a kit that teaches you how to make your own cornhusk doll.

And although it's not a holiday event, The Blessing of the Hounds will take place on November 28. It's like a fox hunt complete with riders, dogs, and a fox—but without the hunt. Exhibits of riding and hunting techniques are offered, savory food and drink is served beside roaring fire pits, and a special blessing is made for the hounds, riders, and even the fox.

### DAILY ADVENTURES

Normal tours and educational programming, called daily adventures, at Shaker Village continue through November and December. Take a comprehensive walking tour of the village or focus on specific subjects like the farm, the harvest, or textile making. Thematic experiences include a tour focusing on Shaker architecture that explains how their theology is reflected in the buildings they constructed.

The daily music program inside the impressive Meeting House is interactive. The program facilitator encourages visitors to get on their feet to dance as Shakers did during their religious observances. Likewise, specialized workshops teach specific skills tied to Shaker crafts, such as how to make brooms tied by hand. •

*Richard Warren is a new contributor from Columbus, Ohio.*



**FOR MORE INFO** Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill is located in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. COVID-19 protocol and related event updates can be found online at shakervillageky.org or call (859) 734-5411. Overnight accommodations are available at The Inn, a collection of guest rooms, suites, and cottages in 13 restored Shaker buildings. It holds the AAA Best of Housekeeping designation, which recognizes the highest possible scores for cleanliness.

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