

Pennsylvania German History Comes Alive

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LANDIS VALLEY (Lancaster Co.) — Walking through the quaint village of Landis Valley Museum, visitors often yearn for the slower paced lifestyles of the 1700s to 1800s.

But don't let the serenity that permeates the grounds fool you.

"Life was no picnic," says a tour guide. "It was not as romantic an era as magazines make it appear."

The guide points to the fly chaser that was used to chase mounds of flies off the food during summer months when screens were unheard of. An iron heated at the fireplace required more time to clean than actual ironing time as early American women pressed their white caps that had been dipped in potato starch.

Food preparation required long hard hours of drudgery over beehive and outdoor ovens not controlled by thermostats.

Perhaps, life was hard when the Pennsylvania Germans settled in the Lancaster area. But the cross-roads village complete with rural artifacts is a showcase of fascinating living history.

The museum was founded by George and Henry Landis, two brothers who lived on the land. The brothers were concerned that the Pennsylvania German history would be lost. They kept many family heirlooms and collected more than 75,000 objects for display in the 1920s.

In 1953, the state acquired the museum and since then several original structures have been relocated on the grounds.

The homes are furnished with painstaking detail to show life spanning from the mid 1700s to the 1900s. Details include corn cob checkers set up for a game, a pair of shoes made before shoes were formed to fit right and left feet, and raised bed gardens growing from heirloom seeds.

Twenty-one separate buildings include a print shop, leatherworking shop, log farm, blacksmith shop, farmsteads, hotel, school, country store, firehouse, tin shop, and pottery shop where Pennsylvania redware and stoneware are created during special demonstrations.

The collections of buildings and artifacts and demonstrations of decorative arts have resulted in Landis Valley Museum being selected as one of the 20 best places to see historical America.

Visitors may participate in a guided tour or explore the grounds at their own pace. Guided tours make history come alive as guides intersperse an abundance of folklore and local history.

Superstitions of the era were enforced with such commands as "go back out the door we came in so we don't leave our good luck behind."

For example, the guide points out that the three styles of fences, which appear on the grounds, represent the different eras with the earliest a split rail, then a groove and rail, and finally a picket.

The museum is open year-round, but a special exhibit of traditional American crafts are on display until April 30. These crafts represent the skills and creativity of more than 100 of the most talented artisans working in America today. Furniture, tin, pewter, folk art, baskets, textiles, and other reproductions produced by artisans are so skillfully executed that it is difficult for even experts to discern from the originals.

The museum is located 2.5 miles northeast of Lancaster on Rt. 272 (Oregon Pike). Admission is \$6 for adults and \$4 for children 6 to 17. The museum is closed on Easter Sunday and on Mondays.

For more information, call (717) 569-0401.



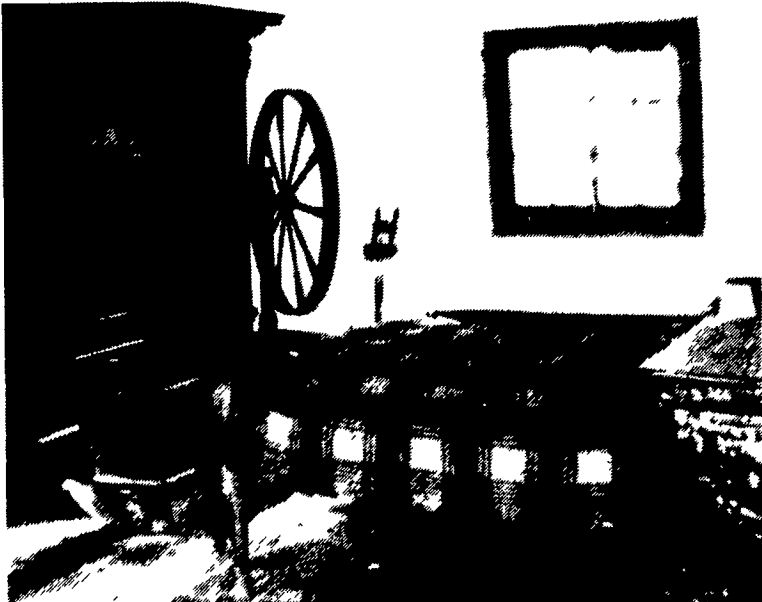
From May to October, daily living history and craft demonstrations span the period from the mid 1700s to 1900.



The living history display at Landis Valley Museum is rated exceptional by AAA and is considered one of the best of 20 places to see historic America.



Museum craftspeople demonstrate early American skills as visitors tour the buildings.



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Some of the buildings have been relocated while others are recreations. Historical breeds of sheep, horses, and geese graze on the land.

Homestead Notes