



An American Tour: 81



Kentucky's Historic *Shaker Village*

Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, is the site of a Shaker religious community that was active from 1805 to 1910. Following a preservationist effort that began in 1961, the site, now a National Historic Landmark, has become a popular tourist destination. Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, or Shakertown, as it is known by residents of the area, is located between Lexington and Harrodsburg, in Kentucky's Bluegrass region.

The Second Great Awakening or Kentucky Revival began in the late 1700s and continued into the early 19th century. A revival was characterized by large camp meetings, where ministers from various Protestant groups would preach for long periods, with music and dancing often adding to the emotional pitch of the congregation. These religious gatherings sometimes drew thousands of observers and participants in the Ohio Valley of Kentucky. They were a form of community for people living scattered in relative isolation on the frontier the rest of the time.

Though the Kentucky Shakers were poor when they started out, they were skilled farmers who made the most of their property. Even the most skeptical observers saw that they prospered, in part because of the high quality of their products. In 1852, a visitor wrote that every article of Shaker produce sold for a third more than what other farmers received. Over the years they expanded their land holdings by acquiring adjacent farms for orchards and fields, and fenced it with stone walls. According to a visitor in 1857, they had paid a hired man for twelve years to work fulltime at building stone walls, and he had completed forty miles of walls, at a cost to the Shakers of about \$1000 per mile. Their buildings were large, substantial, and well-built, and furnished with modern conveniences.

Following the dissolution of the Shaker society in 1910, residents in the region took a renewed interest in the crumbling village of Pleasant Hill. By 1964, the Friends of Pleasant Hill had organized a non-profit corporation, raised funds for operating expenses, and secured a \$2 million federal loan to purchase and restore the site. Today, with 34 original 19th-century buildings and 2,800 acres of farmland, Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill claims to be "the largest historic community of its kind in America."

Visitors to Pleasant Hill can tour the grounds, dine in the Trustee's house, view museum exhibits, listen to performances of Shaker music, observe artisans and farmers at work using traditional 19th century methods, hike the nature trails, and take a riverboat cruise of the Kentucky River. An admission fee is required for most of the tours and exhibits. Overnight lodging is available in many of the restored dwellings. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleasant_Hill,_Kentucky]

