

Greenfield Village looks at Christmas past, present



Christmas trees will be trimmed to represent various eras from 1650 to 1950 in Henry Ford Museum in Greenfield Village.

Christmas comes but once a year. When it comes to Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, the celebration lasts an entire month.

The museum and village will welcome visitors Dec. 1-31 (except Christmas Day) to savor the spirit, customs and heritage of a changing American Christmas.

Through the centuries, Americans' celebration of the ages-old holiday has grown from many different customs, rooted in European traditions transplanted to the New World by hopeful colonists and immigrants. It is a celebration that also has evolved with the country's change from a rural, farming society to an urban, mass-production one.

In the 12-acre museum, holiday visitors can meet St. Nick of the Victorian era before his annual dash around the world. While explaining past customs of gift-giving, he'll offer a free memento to attending children. A character portrayal of Thomas Nast, 19th-century illustrator and cartoonist, will welcome travelers to explore an exhibit of greetings cards and trade cards that express yesteryear images of Christmas.

ALSO ON HAND will be the personification of author Louisa May Alcott, who will share excerpts from her book, "Little

Women," that graphically recount yuletide of another time. Sara Rorer, food editor of the Ladies Home Journal at the turn of the century, will invite guests to join her in setting a proper dinner table for seasonal entertaining.

Several Christmas trees will be trimmed in fashions representative of different eras from 1850 to 1950. There will be an exhibit of antique Christmas tree ornaments and lights, and nearby, museum staff will demonstrate the making of selected traditional ornaments.

Yuletide foods, carolers and choirs, instrumentalists and the playing of antique musical instruments will offer a festive atmosphere throughout the museum. Visitors may even occasionally jump into the fun of dancing to various holiday tunes of the past. Everyone in the family will enjoy the displays of antique toys and gifts, as well as the opportunity to fashion their own simple gift of yesteryear design.

A TREAT FOR youngsters of all ages is the holiday performance of "Babes in Toyland" in Henry Ford Museum Theater. Colorful costumes, lavish sets and familiar songs are part of this fantasy journey. Performances are 2 p.m. on Dec. 1, 8, 15, 22, 26 and 31.

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