

Joys of Christmas Past

The Christmas season is a sentimental one, but as each year rushes by it becomes more difficult to capture the charm of earlier holiday celebrations.

Time was when an orange in the toe of a child's Christmas stocking was a grand surprise, and most of the gifts under the tree were made by hand.

Americans had the time to enjoy the simple pleasures of holiday fellowship -- friends gathered around the parlor organ to sing Yuletide carols, families leisurely decorating the house with freshly-cut greens, or children pausing at the kitchen door to savor the aroma of steaming mince-meat tarts fresh from the oven.



There is one place where the old-fashioned joys of Christmas live on. Its traditions are faithfully re-created each year at Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn. This year, from Dec. 8 through Dec. 31, the Yuletides of yesteryear come to life once more.

In the village, December snow doesn't turn into just a slushy traffic snarl. It's a carpet for horse-drawn sleighs gliding along the streets, past historic homes decorated as they might have been when their original famous owners observed the holidays.

A Christmas tree festooned with American flags and candles in tin holders stands in the parlor of the 1860 Henry Ford birthplace.

Old-fashioned Christmas cards cover the mantel of Orville and Wilbur Wright's family homestead. The Wright tree is decorated with glass balls, popcorn and cranberry strings and colored electric lights, first introduced in 1907.

The traditional Yule log, ready for the hearth, rests at the wellhead of the Cotswold Cottage, more than 300 years old. Inside, the rooms are decked with boxwood garlands and holly and ivy.

A festive pyramid of luxury-imported fruits graces the dining room table of the 18th century Secretary Pearson House.

From the pillars and porches of historic Clinton Inn,

cedar roping proclaims the holiday season, while inside visitors warm themselves at the fire, relishing food and drink just as their travel weary forefathers did a century ago.

Across the village green, complimentary hot spiced cider and Christmas cookies await chilly guests in the Town Hall. Outside, carolers wander down the village streets, and the smell of freshly baked bread lingers near the pioneer cabin where it is baked in the hearth.

Along the street of shops in the museum, craftsmen blow glass Christmas ornaments, make holiday wreaths and fashion tin cookie cutters, hooked rugs, quilts and pottery and other items like those found in early American homes.

Nearby is a special exhibit of antique toys, where children peer into 19th century doll houses and wonder at toys their great-grandparents might have found under the Christmas tree -- carved wooden boats, Civil War drums and cannons, glassies, doll carriages and hobby horses.

In the Museum Theater, the classic tale of "Jack and the Beanstalk" delights children and parents alike, honoring the past tradition of holiday entertainment for the entire family.

The old-fashioned spirit of Christmas is alive and well at Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum.

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Bingo Night Planned

The Detroit Association for the Performing Arts will sponsor a bingo evening Sunday, Dec. 23, at 7 p.m. in UAW Local 182 hall, 35603 Plymouth Rd., Livonia.

The evening will include quicky, early bird, Las Vegas, sudden death, share the wealth, and special jack pot bingo.

Games are held every Sunday at 7 p.m. in cooperation with the Wayne Ford Civic League and UAW Local 182 of Livonia.

Proceeds will be used for DAPA musical activities, special area programming and scholarships.

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