

Winter in the 1800s

Greenfield Village shows life before furnaces

By Arlene Funke
staff writer

Brr . . . the wind is howling and the temperature is dipping.

Let's just turn up the thermostat a notch or two. Maybe take a long, hot shower, then curl up in front of the TV.

Sure, that's easy nowadays. But what if you lived in the 1800s?

A new program at Greenfield Village in Dearborn aims to give a sampling of how people coped with winter before gas furnaces, electricity and modern gadgets that made life more comfortable.

The program, which runs through March 12, is a 2½-hour tour of five buildings in the village emphasizing changes that took place in the 1800s.

"They (exhibits) focus on the change from a rural to an industrialized society," said Candace Matelic, manager of interpretive programs. "It's a story that we find exciting."

In the past, during the slower winter season, several buildings at the village were open for guided tours at random. This year, the exhibit has a focus.

INTERPRETERS (guides) conducting the tour spend 15 or 20 minutes at each building on the tour, explaining technical points and answering questions.

The tour includes a ride in a sleigh or carriage, and free refreshments at the Clinton Inn on the village grounds.

The five stopping points are the homes of Henry Ford and Orville and Wilbur Wright, the Sarah Jordan boarding house, the Menlo Park compound



This kerosene lamp hangs on a wall in the old kitchen, now a family room, of the Henry Ford birthplace. Additional features of this lamp include a swinging arm coupled with a reflector.

where Thomas Edison perfected his inventions, and the Cohen Millinery and Dry Goods Shop.

THE FORD BIRTHPLACE was a rural farmhouse of late 1870s vintage — a simple house that used a wood-burning stove, candles and kerosene lights. A portable tin bathtub was used for washing.

In contrast, the Wright brothers' home, from Dayton, Ohio, was a middle-class house circa 1900. It had gas heat radiators, a gas stove, porcelain sink and icebox.

The Jordan boarding house of 1879 used electric power.

"Visitors can see the changes and how they changed our lives," said Ms. Matelic. "They made tasks easier and allowed for more leisure time."

The Menlo Park exhibit illustrates the abundance of inventions that ushered in the modern era of machinery and electrical power systems.

"There was quite a bit of interaction between inventors," said Ms. Matelic. "These changes didn't happen in a vacuum."

THE COHEN Millinery and Dry Goods Shop, which operated in Detroit in the late 1890s, highlights the beginning of mass production, retailing and advertising.

Buying a new hat was one way the 19th century woman perked her spirits. The hat bodies and trims both were mass produced, then mixed and matched in the store to the customer's taste.

The interpreter assumes the role of the shop clerk, urging "customers" to try on an assortment of styles.

"We are working toward putting the dry goods aspect into the building," said Ms. Matelic.

GREENFIELD VILLAGE, operated by the non-profit Edison Institute, is on Oakwood south of Michigan Avenue in Dearborn.

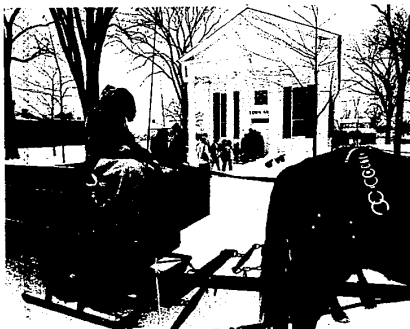
Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week (closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year).

The first tour leaves at 10 a.m., and the last at 2:30 p.m. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$3.50 for children aged six to 12, and \$5.50 for senior citizens 62 and older.

Admissions to the Henry Ford Museum, also at the village complex, are separate.



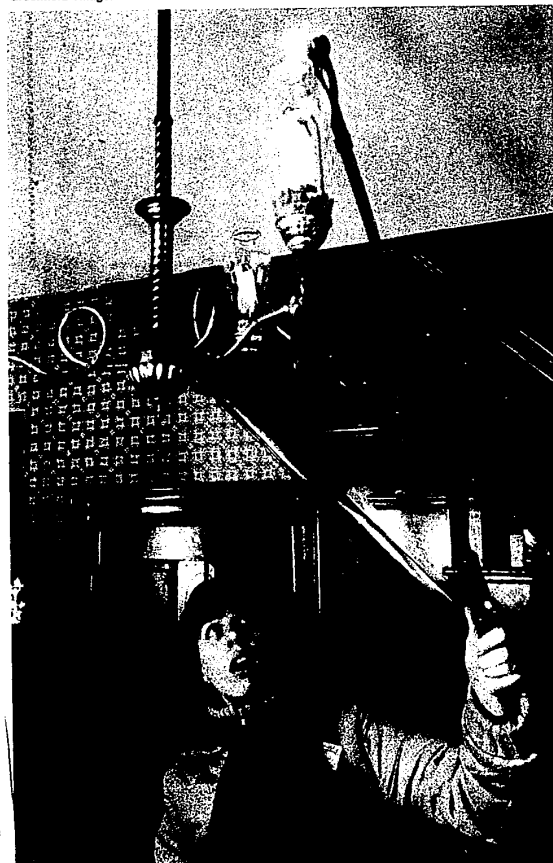
Standing patiently outside the Gatehouse, horses await the final loading of passengers before embarking on a winter tour of Greenfield Village.



The sleigh ride's first stop is Town Hall where a short film is presented to acquaint the people with technological advances preserved at Greenfield Village.



After leaving Town Hall and visiting the Wright family home, visitors walk toward the Henry Ford birthplace.



photos by GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

Guide Tricia Sadler lights a gas lamp in the Wright family home. Even though electricity was available, the Wrights chose to use gas

because they thought it was safer. Orville Wright was born in this home, which, at the time, was considered a modern house.

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