
Families' Expectations: Designing Exhibits & Delivering History in the “Edutainment Age”

NEMA Annual Conference
Wednesday, November 8, 2006

Developing Family Programming at Canterbury Shaker Village



History of Canterbury Shaker Village

“A place for learning, reflection and renewal of the

human spirit.”

- 1774 - Ann Lee and 7 followers leave England, sail to NYC and soon after settle at Watervliet near Albany, NY. Shakers live Christian, celibate, pacifist, communal, egalitarian lives.
- 1792 - Canterbury Society formally established
- 1850's – 300 members, 100 buildings, 4000 acres. Shakers known for inventions, seed industry, herbal medicines, textile production, broom business, etc.
- Post-Civil War Population Decline
- 1939 - Last Brother, Irving Greenwood, dies
- 1969 - Shaker Village Museum, Inc. established
- 1992 - Last Sister, Ethel Hudson, dies
- 1990's - Focus on building restoration
- 2000's - Focus on visitor programming



History of Family Programming at CSV

Not much pre-2004! Family activities generally limited to special events once a month

- 1988 - *Learning About Shakers* - Book for Teachers & Parents – By Nancy Thompson
- 1980's-Present - 2 hour school field trip programs
- 2000 - Visitor Survey – “Not a good place to bring kids”
 - No hands-on activities, tours “over kids’ heads”
- 2003 - Received IMLS Learning Opportunities Grant
Goal: To interpret CSV to all ages
- 2004 Season
 - Hired Family Programs Coordinator
 - Opened Family Activity Center
 - Started “Shaker Family Tours”



Family Activity Center (1905 Creamery)

- Opened June 2004 with IMLS Learning Opportunities Grant
- Open weekends May-June, 7 days/week July-August, weekends after Labor Day
- Always staffed – staff encourages families to try activities together
- Activities available:
 - “Make-It/Take-It” Craft Table – Traditional crafts
 - Floor & Tapestry Looms
 - New England and Shaker-themed Book Corner
 - Shaker Dress Up/“Make-believe” Corner
 - Inventions Table
 - Art projects
 - Coming soon: Messy Project Kitchen



Shaker Family Tour

Offered twice a day weekends May-June, 7 days/week July-August, weekends after Labor Day

Directed at kids, interpretation is age-appropriate (not so with regular adult tour)

What was it like be a Shaker at Canterbury Shaker Village?

- Chapel – *Introduction to the Shakers*
 - ❑ What were the Shakers' basic beliefs?
 - ❑ Why were they called "Shakers?" - Learn "Simple Gifts" song & dance
- Dwelling House – *Communal Living*
 - ❑ How did daily living change through time? - "Simply Colorful" 1840's reproduction bedroom vs. Sister Ethel's Bedroom (1992)
- Laundry – *Work*
 - ❑ How did the Shakers organize a major work task like Laundry?
 - ❑ What inventions did they have to help them?
- School
 - ❑ What was it like for kids to go to school at Canterbury Shaker Village?
 - ❑ Shaker Handwriting Activity



Other kids' programs...

- Girl & Boy Scout Programs
- Home school programs
 - Traditional crafts, cooking, art, "Young Naturalists"
- "Explorers" Summer Camp 2006:
 - "History Happenings" (2 weeks)
 - "Nature's Palette"
 - "Green Thumb"
 - "Take a Hike!"



After 3 seasons...survey says:

- Summer 2005 Survey of 200+ families with children ages 3-12 (only included families visiting for the day, not participating in camp, homeschool programs, etc.)

From the Executive Summary:

"The *affective* experience of families 'appears to be quite favorable'...most families felt that their overall experience *exceeded* their expectations. They gave high ratings to the staff, the educational value, being a 'good place to take children' and being 'worth the money.' Most NH residents felt that CSV is a 'place you can visit again and again.'"

The *interpretive* experience "is appropriate and understandable for children in the target age range (3-12)" and "family programming is a welcome and effective addition to the site."

- Increasing use of Family Activity Center ('04: ~2439, '05: ~2998, '06: ~3250)
 - 70+ participants in homeschool programs since 2004
 - 40+ participants in 2006 "Explorers" summer vacation program
 - Family programs filling more frequently
 - Anecdotal increase in the number of family memberships
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2007 Season & Beyond...

- New Director very supportive of family programs
- 2007 season exhibit theme: *Simply Modern: The Canterbury Shakers' Journey Through the 20th Century*
 - Hands-on activities throughout new exhibits
 - Exhibit on 20th c. Shakers' pets in Family Center
- Continue reaching out to local families:
 - Expanded environmental education programs
 - More regular "Meet the Sheep & Chickens" and daily nature walks
 - Improvements to approx. 5 mile trail system
 - Children's garden
 - Expanded summer vacation programs
 - Expanded homeschool programs

