

# THE RESTORATION



SHAKER VILLAGE  
OF PLEASANT HILL

After the Shakers were gone, the buildings and property passed into private hands. For the next 37 years, the buildings changed hands many times and the furnishings were dispersed. Some buildings disappeared, and others fell into varying states of decay and disuse. New buildings – primarily farm buildings – were built amid the Shaker-built structures. Because of excellent Shaker craftsmanship, the large structures remained sound.

The narrow village road, once a section of the National Turnpike, became U.S. Highway 68. The once vibrant community was now quiet and the Shakers were nearly forgotten. Where 19th-century travelers on horseback had been startled by immense structures, motorists passed by and wondered at this orderly settlement miles from the nearest large city.

The buildings took on new functions. The Trustees' Office was operated as a restaurant. The Meeting House became the Shakertown Baptist Church. The Carpenter's Shop served as a general store and the Farm Deacon's Shop was a gas station. Many small workshops were tenant houses with Victorian porches obscuring Shaker lines. Although Goodwill Industries leased the Centre Family Dwelling for storage, the structure was never entirely used.

In early 1961, a ground swell of interest in saving these historic structures brought on the formation of an organization to acquire and restore them. That same year, Shakertown at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, Inc., was formed as a nonprofit, educational corporation. The title is a combination the community's "worldly" name and its original Shaker designation.

Earl D. Wallace, a well-known Kentucky businessman, led the group. Members came from central Kentucky as well as Louisville and Lexington. Mr. Wallace was elected chairman of the board of trustees, a position he held until his death in 1990.

James Lowry Cogar, the first curator of Colonial Williamsburg, came back in 1962 to his native state to become the first president of Shaker Village. Mr. Cogar was responsible for the innovative plan for adaptive use of historic buildings and excellence in restoration standards. He insisted upon the purchase of 2,250 acres of original Shaker land to act as a buffer against commercial encroachment.

In 1964, Mr. Cogar hired James C. Thomas who had worked with the restoration of Louisville's Locust Grove, the last home of General George Rogers Clark. A year after Mr. Cogar's retirement in 1974, James Thomas became the second president of Shaker Village, and served in that capacity until his retirement in May 2005.

When restoration began in 1966, it became apparent that no government agency or trust would provide long-

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term support and Pleasant Hill must be self-sufficient. Admission income also would not be enough to ensure the project's long term survival. The board of trustees understood the need to create a unique environment where visitors are immersed in the Shaker experience. Dining, overnight lodging and craft sales would fulfill that vision and assure success.

Work began to bring Pleasant Hill back to its nineteenth-century appearance. All utilities were buried, walks repaired or replaced; original paint colors discovered and duplicated. In 1965, U.S. Highway 68 was re-routed to bypass the village and, in 1968, the main village road was restored to its original appearance. The same year, a few exhibition buildings, lodging accommodations, the dining room and first crafts sales shop opened to the public.

In 1986, Shaker Village acquired the West Lot, an adjoining property of 480 acres and three original Shaker buildings. Restoration of this area was completed in 1992.