

# Shaker Villages: Saltboxes, Stone Walls, and Steeples of a Vanished Faith



Nestled amidst the rolling hills of New England and Kentucky, Shaker villages stand as testaments to a vanished faith and a remarkable way of life. These meticulously preserved communities offer a glimpse into the world of the Shakers, a religious sect that flourished in the 19th century and left behind a legacy of architectural innovation, sustainable practices, and unwavering beliefs.

**New England Icons: Shaker Villages, Saltboxes, Stone Walls and Steeples** by Bruce Irving

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5



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## **Saltboxes: A Shelter for the Shaker Community**

The iconic saltbox homes of the Shaker villages are instantly recognizable with their asymmetrical roofs, sloping down to the back of the house. These practical dwellings provided shelter for the large Shaker families and served multiple functions within the community.

The first floor typically consisted of a large kitchen, where meals were prepared for the entire village. The second floor was divided into sleeping quarters, with separate rooms for men and women. A central chimney provided warmth and cooking facilities for the entire house.

## **Stone Walls: Boundaries and Legacy**

Enclosing the Shaker villages were miles of meticulously constructed stone walls, a testament to the Shakers' commitment to order and industry. These formidable barriers served both practical and symbolic purposes.

Practically, the stone walls protected the village from livestock and trespassers. They also provided drainage and prevented erosion on the hilly terrain. Symbolically, the walls represented the boundaries of the Shaker community, separating them from the outside world.

## **Steeple: A Beacon of Faith**

Rising above the saltboxes and stone walls, the Shaker steeples were a prominent feature of the villages. These elegant structures served as more than just bell towers; they represented the spiritual aspirations of the Shaker community.

The steeples were often adorned with intricate weather vanes, symbolizing the Shakers' belief in divine guidance. The bells themselves summoned the community to worship, meals, and other important gatherings.

## **Unique Architectural Features**

Beyond their saltboxes, stone walls, and steeples, Shaker villages exhibited a range of distinctive architectural features that reflected their values and lifestyle.

Buildings were typically constructed using simple, functional designs, emphasizing utility over ornamentation. Windows were large and numerous, allowing for ample natural light and ventilation.

Interiors were characterized by clean lines, whitewashed walls, and built-in cabinetry. The Shakers believed in simplicity and order, which was reflected in their architectural choices.

## **Sustainable Practices: A Legacy of Environmental Stewardship**

The Shakers were not only renowned for their architectural innovations but also for their commitment to sustainable practices. They were pioneers in water conservation, recycling, and organic farming.

They implemented innovative water systems, including cisterns and aqueducts, to ensure a reliable supply of clean water. They practiced crop rotation and composting to maintain soil fertility.

The Shakers' sustainable practices were centuries ahead of their time and continue to inspire environmentalists and architects today.

### **Spiritual Legacy: A Community of Believers**

The Shaker faith was centered on the belief in celibacy, communal living, and pacifism. They rejected the concept of marriage and procreation, believing that spiritual perfection could be achieved through a life devoted to God.

The Shakers lived in self-sufficient communities, sharing their wealth and labor for the common good. They practiced equality and mutual support, regardless of age or gender.

Although the Shaker movement declined in the late 19th century, their legacy continues to resonate. Their principles of simplicity, sustainability, and community are still relevant and inspiring today.

### **Preserving the Shaker Legacy**

Today, several Shaker villages have been preserved and opened to the public, offering visitors a chance to experience this unique way of life firsthand.

In Hancock, Massachusetts, the Hancock Shaker Village is a living history museum where visitors can learn about Shaker customs, tour historic buildings, and witness traditional crafts demonstrations.

In Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill has been restored to its 1850s appearance, providing a glimpse into the daily life of the Shaker community.

These preserved Shaker villages serve as a testament to the enduring legacy of the Shaker faith and their contributions to American architecture, sustainability, and spirituality.

The Shaker villages of New England and Kentucky are more than just historical relics; they are living testimonies to a vanished faith and a remarkable way of life. Their saltboxes, stone walls, and steeples continue to inspire awe and admiration, while their sustainable practices and spiritual legacy remind us of the importance of community, simplicity, and a deep connection to the land.

By exploring these preserved Shaker villages, we gain a profound appreciation for the ingenuity, faith, and communal spirit that shaped these unique communities. Their legacy continues to inspire and challenge us to live more sustainable, harmonious, and fulfilling lives.



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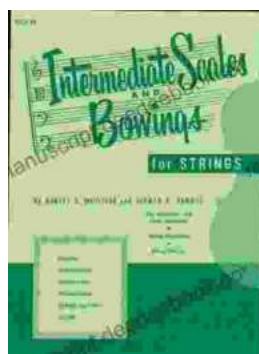
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