

# THE FARMERS' MUSEUM®

## The Farmers' Museum Story

Established in 1943, on land that has been part of a working farm since the 1790s, The Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y., brings to life the challenges and rewards of pre-industrial life in rural America.

Through authentic demonstrations and interpretive exhibits, the rural-history museum depicts the interplay among trades, village life and agriculture in New York State agrarian society of the 1840s. Five areas offer visitors an opportunity to experience firsthand the extraordinary aspects of the lives of ordinary people 150 years ago: the Main Barn, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, houses exhibitions; the 1845 Village, where skilled craftspeople practice the arts and trades of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century; the Seneca Log House, which illustrates the life of a Native American family in the 1840s; Lippitt Farmstead, a working farm with rare heritage animal breeds and other livestock; The Country Fair, a summer-long attraction reminiscent of a late 19th-century fair; and The Empire State Carousel, a handcrafted merry-go-round celebrating the history, art, culture, and environment of New York State. The activities and rhythms of everyday living, from broom making and weaving to milking cows and blacksmithing, serve as windows to the past in a superb historical reconstruction that will fascinate adults and children alike.

The magnificent, Colonial Revival-style Main Barn, flanked by twin silos, was designed by architect Frank Whiting and built in 1917 of local fieldstone, for the prize dairy herd of Edward Severin Clark. Farmers and others traveled from miles around to see the impressive building and dubbed it "the cow palace." In 1998, part of the barn's interior was transformed into the Louis C. Jones Center, which serves as a multi-purpose locale for concerts, crafts demonstrations, wedding receptions, community events and educational programs.

In the adjacent Creamery, also part of the original stone complex constructed for Clark, craftspeople at the American Paper Staining Manufactory handmake wallpaper using the only wooden block press of its kind in the U.S., along with period patterns, paints and techniques. In addition to custom-made wallpaper, the Manufactory produces hand-sewn bandboxes, which make wonderful gifts or keepsakes. Bandboxes can be purchased at Todd's General Store. On the other side of the Main Barn is the Herder's Cottage, the third stone building of the 1917 farm, where you will find The Farmers' Museum Store featuring an imaginative selection of ceramics, glass, textiles, books, and children's toys.

The Farmers' Museum's Country Fair, a summer-long attraction reminiscent of a 1910 fair, features two colorful period tents housing good old-fashioned fun for all ages. Across from the Country Fair sits the beloved Empire State Carousel, a full-sized operating merry-go-round conceived by carousel craftsman Gerry Holzman and completed over a twenty-year period by more than a thousand volunteer artisans from across New York State. This handcrafted whirling wonder celebrates the history, culture, and environment of New York State through 24 whimsical riding animals, portrait

panels of famous New Yorkers, and contemporary folk art.

The heart of The Farmers' Museum is the 1845 Village, comprising more than 20 buildings relocated from small towns across central New York State and laid out around a village green. They present not only a range of architectural styles, but also typify the domestic and commercial composition of a rural hamlet. At Middlefield Printing Office visitors can observe how a flatbed press set with lead type would have been used to print a newspaper.

Heritage gardens are planted throughout, including a medicinal garden outside Dr. Thrall's Pharmacy and a woodland herbal garden adjacent to the Seneca Log House. That structure, moved from the Seneca Reservation at Tonawanda, where it was originally built, and reconstructed on the outskirts of the village, constitutes one of the most fascinating interpretive exhibits at the museum -- a typical dwelling that might have been occupied by a Native American family of that era.

Other heritage gardens include the Maze Garden, a Children's Garden and The Bump Garden, which is based on designs by Andrew Jackson Downing, the country's foremost landscape architect in the 1840s.

To everything there is a season, and at Lippitt Farmstead, the museum's working farm, visitors experience the agricultural rhythms that defined rural life of the period. The farm's effort to preserve rare heritage breeds of animals, like Devon cattle, Dominique chickens and Cayuga ducks, is just one of many elements adding dimension to the museum's truly living history. Each year, visitors enjoy meeting our newborn calves, lambs and other youngsters from the breeding program.

Annual special events at The Farmers' Museum provide glimpses into the celebratory aspects of rural life 150 years ago and memorable focal points for family visits: Sugaring Off Sundays in March; Independence Day celebration in July; the two-day Harvest Festival in September; and in December, Candlelight Evening, one of the region's brightest holiday traditions.

The site of The Farmers' Museum has deep roots in New York State's rural past. The museum's 120 acres overlook Otsego Lake, where Native peoples came to fish in the warmer seasons, and the land has been part of a working farms since the 1790s. Samuel Nelson, a local lawyer who became a Supreme Court Justice and whose office is part of The Farmers' Museum's village, purchased the farm in 1829 and raised sheep there. Fenimore Farm, as it came to be known, changed hands again in the 1870s, when the Clark family acquired it. The Main Barn, Creamery and Herder's Cottage are all listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Since opening, the museum's collection of artifacts has increased from 5,000 to more than 23,000.

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