

## "Jack Larkin to Speak About Everyday Life In America"

Carroll County Times Article for 2 March 1997

By Jay A. Graybeal

On Saturday, March 22, the Historical Society and the Union Mills Homestead Foundation will hold its second in a series of historical lectures commemorating the Homestead's Bicentennial. The lecture will be held at 1:00 p.m. in the Society's Shriver-Weybright Auditorium, 210 E. Main St. in Westminster. The public is invited and admission is free.

Our speaker will be Jack Larkin, Director of Research, Collections, and Library and Chief Historian at Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge Massachusetts. Mr. Larkin has studied and written extensively about many facets of everyday life in America, particularly the period following the Revolution to the years before the Civil War. His lecture will draw heavily from the research for his book *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840* published by Harper & Row in 1988. The New York Times Book Review gave the book high marks:

"Recounting the customs and styles of life of ordinary people during a period of rapid and unsettling social and economic change, Jack Larkin, the chief historian at Old Sturbridge Village, the outdoor history museum in Sturbridge, Mass., illuminates an astonishing range of activities. These include infant feeding; the care of chamber pots, privies and grave yards; the use of broadside ballads, parlor songs and communal dances; the celebration of holidays and routines of travel; the production, design and use of clothing and household items; even the treatment of pets. Habits of speech and manners are sketched, as well as broad patterns of work, religion, sexuality and family life. Virtually all human activity in the late 18th and early 19th centuries comes in for scrutiny in this compact and insightful work."

Mr. Larkin will explore seven themes in his lecture that follow these chapter titles of his above mentioned book: "A Busy, Bustling, Industrious Population"; The Rhythms and Limits of Life; Comfortable Habitations": Houses and the Domestic Environment; "The Masks Which Custom Had Prescribed": Intimate Life; "The Whole Population Is in Motion": The Experience of Travel; "The Practice of Music" and last, "Occasions to Meet Together": The Social World.

Mr. Larkin's will talk encompass far more, however, than a simple review of his book. Union Mills Homestead Board Member and lecture series chair, Chuck Ives, III, has selected manuscripts for Mr. Larkin from the Shriver Papers at the Maryland Historical Society that illustrate themes presented in Larkin's book. This will enable Mr. Larkin to comment on the lifestyles of the Shrivvers and how their experiences relate to other American families of the era.

The everyday lives of Americans in the early nineteenth century was far different as Mr. Larkin has observed:

"The physical texture of American Life was far closer to that in the villages of many third-world countries today than to anything in the present-day United States. Everywhere the nights were intensely dark and the stars intensely bright. Most houses were small and poorly lit. Americans were usually dirty and often insect-ridden. Smells-of the barnyard and stable, tannery and tavern, house and hearth, privy and chamber pot-were pungent and profuse. Food was often heavy and coarse; most meat was heavily salted, tastes were harsh. Hard physical exertion was an ordinary and unremarkable part of life for all but a few. Disease and bodily discomfort could rarely be cured, only endured, and death was an early and frequent visitor. Childbirth posed significant risks to health and life. So did many kinds of work. The

extremes of cold and heat could not easily be escaped, indoors or out. Courting couples acted with a freedom that would surprise those nostalgic for the "good old days" of sexual restraint. Heavy drinking was part of almost every social gathering, and violent confrontations and blood sports were common in public life."

Photo caption: Everyday life at the Union Mills Homestead and in America will be the subject of a lecture by Jack Larkin of Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, Ma., on Saturday, March 22 at the Historical Society. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Miss Lillian Shipley, 1979.