

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

The Village Crèche – Then and Now

Since 1954, the Christmas Manger scene at the corner of Drake and Shawnee Run Roads has been a Village holiday tradition. In the early years, the crèche was constructed on Stephan Field by volunteers from Armstrong Church and Indian Hill Church. It was a rough lean-to, featuring the Holy Family and animals, including a cow and calf, a donkey, a colt, and some sheep – borrowed from Hunt's End Farm.

For the first several years, the male volunteers who assembled the structure were served lunch by ladies of both churches. The original mannequins were gifts from Pogue's Department Store. (Mr. & Mrs. John Pogue were active in Indian Hill Church at that time.) Since there were more female mannequins than male ones, facial hair was added to Joseph to make him appear more masculine. In 1956, the Crèche was moved to the northeast corner of the intersection, so that the first Twelfth Night Festival could be held on the southeast corner. Families brought discarded Christmas trees, and after a brief service celebrating the beginning of Epiphany, the pile of trees was set on fire – a remarkable spectacle for all in attendance.

In 1997, a Christmas Eve Community Carol Sing was organized by Kenneth Schonberg, who provided songbooks for the informal gathering. Invited to "bring children, bring candles", families shared joyous song with their neighbors for almost 20 years, until the late 1980s. The Indian Hill Historical Society revived this tradition in 2001 and 2002, sharing the spirit of the season with the community.



The Service Department assumed the duty of constructing and maintaining the Manger scene in 1967. One year the donkey was borrowed from a farmer in Louisville, KY. The next year, the Village purchased Sara, the donkey used for many seasons. Occasional vandalism has included the theft of baby Jesus, decapitation of one of the Wise Men, and disrobing all the figures. Once the donkey was stolen, and another time the sheep escaped. One year the sheep gave birth to twins. The mannequins have always been attired by women from the Administration/Ranger Building, and this practice continues today. In 1980 the EPA passed a law regulating pollution, and the tree burning Twelfth Night ceremony ended.

Within the last five years, the Public Works Department has completely rebuilt the entire structure. It is composed of 6 x 6 beams, large panels, sturdy fencing with bolts, and is then covered with straw bales. All the pieces are stored in a stone barn on State Route 126, and transported to the Village crossroads early in December. Using a backhoe, 4 or 5 men assemble the scene. Beams slide easily into the permanent holes in the ground, and with the new larger sections, the construction process is simpler and uniform. Lighting illuminates the Crèche, and a mulch path is installed for visitors.

Last to arrive are the animals, which arrive the old fashioned way. Turner Farm delivers them in their draft horse drawn carriage. The sheep ride in the attached trailer, to which the donkey is attached by a rope. When the procession gets to the Crèche, the animals go into their pens, and the last bolts are fastened.

In 2008 three male and one female mannequins were purchased by the Village, assuring that all standing figures are new. Baby Jesus and the kneeling Wise Man are older. The Crèche, a tradition for more than 50 years, remains an enchanting facet of the Village during the holidays.

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