

Form 10-300  
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>Kentucky</b>	
COUNTY: <b>Mercer</b>	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:  
**Shakertown at Pleasant Hill Historic District**

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**Shakertown at Pleasant Hill**

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**U.S. Route 68**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Shakertown**

STATE <b>Kentucky</b>	CODE	COUNTY: <b>Mercer</b>	CODE
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3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Shakertown at Pleasant Hill, Inc.**

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Shakertown**

STATE:  
**Kentucky**

CODE:

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Mercer County Courthouse**

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Harrodsburg**

STATE:  
**Kentucky**

CODE:

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Historic American Buildings Survey**

DATE OF SURVEY: **1934**     Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**Library of Congress**

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Washington**

STATE:  
**District of Columbia**

CODE:

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

(Check One)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriarated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
(Check One)			(Check One)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

(Abridged from Pleasant Hill and its Shakers, Thomas D. Clark and F. Gerald Ham, (Pleasant Hill, 1968)

The principal architectural force on the construction of the buildings at Pleasant Hill was Micajah Burnett. This youth came close to being a genius in the field of engineering, architecture, and administration. He had been brought into the Society of Shakers in 1809 by his parents when he was seventeen years of age. Six years later the twenty-three year old convert proved himself mature enough to begin the realization of the Pleasant Hill dream of providing adequate permanent structures to house the families and their activities. He laid out the village with its great family houses, a meeting house, craft shops, utility sheds, and barns.

Burnett's plan for housing the families called for three large structures facing on a village stree. The first one of these was approximately 55 by 45 feet, and was three stories high with a towering attic on top. Across the rear was a dining and kitchen ell measuring 30 x 60 feet. This house was based on a heavy limestone foundation which enclosed a deep basement. The walls were constructed of native bricks, and the trim of stone quarried on Shaker property.

To carry out Burnett's ambitious plans it was necessary for Shaker workment to busy themselves in rock quarry, clay pit, and the woods assembling the materials for such massive structures. They cut stone from the cliffside of the Kentucky River Gorge, burned limestone to make the lime, formed thousands of clay bricks, and hewed and sawed the heavy beams which went into the superstructure of the building, and sawed and dressed the flooring and finish lumber. The quality of the timber can still be viewed in the fine ash floors of the East Family House.

Within the remarkably short time of three years, 1817-1819, the East Family residence was completed. By 1822 the West Family House was constructed. By this time young Burnett had gained enormous experience in the erection of massive buildings. He worked largely with native and maybe initially unskilled labor, and with raw native materials. He had no access to specialty milling plants, stone dressing shops, or to supply houses for custom-made materials. No sooner was the West Family House finished than work was begun on the construction of the large Center Family unit. This is a three-story structure built on a 55 x 60 foot foundation to which is appended a 34 x 85 foot dining room and kitchen. This building was to replace the first Center Family dwelling built in 1812-1815.

The lines of the Center Family building differ somewhat from those of the neighboring family houses. It has square gabled ends and three massive chimneys. It was not until 1834 that this building was completed and ready to accommodate 100 occupants. Delay in construction was

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**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century            | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1909-1910**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |   |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education    | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry     | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                        | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agriculture  | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention    | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Art          | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                        | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature   | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Military     |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music        |   |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In 1805 The Shaker community, known as Pleasant Hill, was founded in Mercer County, Kentucky. The community plan was first laid out in 1808. From 1809 to 1860 the village grew to its maximum size and prosperity. After the Civil War, decline overtook the Shaker organization and finally in 1910 the last of the Shaker property was deeded into private hands. In 1961 Shakertown at Pleasant Hill, Inc. was organized to conserve and restore what remained of the original community. The corporation has acquired 2200 acres of the original tract and restored most of the extant buildings. The entire community is open to the public as an historic area.

The Shakers, or "The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing" were a gentle, strict, and industrious religious order of celibate men and women who believed in the second appearing of Christ, as a woman, in the form of the founder, Mother Ann Lee. Greatly misunderstood and often mocked for there celibacy and religious dancing, the Shakers are universally admired for their architecture and handcraft's. Thomas Merton, the Trappist Monk from the nearby Abbey of Gethsemani, said of the Pleasant Hill Shakers, "the most eloquent witness to the Shaker spirit is the fruit of their labor." At Pleasant Hill the Shakers created a spare, graceful architecture which varies from the austere stone Central Family House built from 1824 to 1843 to the restrained elegance of the Trustee's Office with its soaring matched pair of spiral stairs. The large number and type of original Shaker buildings at Pleasant Hill and the fact that they still exist in their virtually unaltered original rural setting make Shakertown at Pleasant Hill an architectural and spiritual experience unsurpassed in the United States. In the words of Mother Ann Lee "order is the creation of beauty. It is heaven's first law, and the protection of souls."

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**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Thomas D. Clark and F. Gerald Ham, Pleasant Hill and Its Shakers, (Shakertown Press, Pleasant Hill, Ky., 1968); Bettye L. Mastin, Quick Glimpses of Pleasant Hill, (Richard S. Decamp, Lexington, Ky., 1969); Thomas Merton, "The Shakers", Jubilee, Jan. 1964; National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, N.P.S., unpublished manuscript, Theme XXII, "Social and Humanitarian Movements", pp. 141-143.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	37° 50' 25"	84° 45' 46"		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	37° 50' 25"	84° 43' 17"				
SE	37° 48' 04"	84° 45' 46"				
SW	37° 48' 04"	84° 43' 17"				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 2200 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: W. Brown Morton III, Architect

ORGANIZATION: Historic Surveys, O.A.H.P., National Park Service DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

STREET AND NUMBER: 801 19th Street N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: District of Columbia CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

<p>As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Title _____</p> <p>Date _____</p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p>_____ Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</p> <p>Date _____</p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p>_____ Keeper of The National Register</p> <p>Date _____</p>
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caused by lack of funds but primarily by dissension within the community itself.

Burnett did not busy himself with the construction of three large residences alone. Between 1810 and 1834 barns, shops, a laundry, a tannery, a water pumping and supply station, and other outbuildings were constructed. In this period Burnett and Tyler Baldwin built the excellent grist mill and the stone fulling mill. Perhaps there were no other barns or general farm buildings in Kentucky before 1840 which were so large in size or so well designed and constructed. The builders not only sought to create shelter for their animals, products, tools, and crafts, but to give them a high degree of efficiency and permanence. Foundations were laid with stone as were those in the great family houses. It took an enormous amount of manual labor to hew the heavy framing beams and to saw the large amount of lumber needed for walls and flooring to say nothing of the labor needed to construct the buildings themselves.

In many respects the most ingeniously designed and constructed building at Pleasant Hill is the clapboard Meeting House. Externally this is the least impressive of the main buildings. External appearances however are most deceiving. Micajah Burnett was confronted with the challenge of erecting a building which would contain an auditorium large enough to accommodate the membership of the Society. Because of the ritualistic nature of Shaker worship the great hall had to be free of central obstructions. The location of supporting stanchions in the auditorium would prove both obstructive and hazardous in the process of the dance form of worshipping. Because of the vigorous physical expression of emotions which took place the walls and superstructure of the building had to be strong enough to withstand an intense amount of vibration.

The Meeting House was constructed in 1820. It is 60 x 44 feet and rests upon a heavy limestone foundation. The walls are suspended on an intricate framework of heavy studding and plates of hewn timbers. The roof and ceiling are supported or suspended on a series of interlocking cantilever-type trusses and overhead studdings and rafters. The ceiling cross beams are suspended from above by tie trusses which distribute a good part of the weight on the rafters.

An exploratory visit to the attic of the Meeting House reveals a superb job of notching, fitting, and balancing of cross members. Actually much of the weight stress is relieved in the carefully notched joints.

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In a century and a half the Shaker Meeting House has stood the vicissitudes of weather, insects, instability of central Kentucky soils, and the hard usages of Shakers and the subsequent tenants who have worshipped here. There is now no appreciable evidence of a weakening of timbers, or of other types of deterioration. The wood-work in this building is comparable if not superior to that in any of the standing ancient English manor houses.

In design the buildings at Pleasant Hill give almost certain external evidence that Burnett was heavily influenced by the currently popular federal style of public architecture as well as by a central design of Shaker buildings approved by the New Lebanon Ministry. This design permitted him to provide a maximum amount of space with a minimum amount of cutting and arranging of internal walls and stanchion supports. It was possible to design with relative ease for the administration of a celibate society which was co-sexual in organization. Separate entryways could be provided so as not to mar the general appearance of the facades of the buildings. Internally separate dormitory quarters could be established in keeping with the external forms of the building.

The family buildings at Pleasant Hill contain cavernous amounts of space in their deep cellars, and in the broad attics underneath the hips of the spacious roofs. Space of this type was of the utmost importance to serve both the living arrangements of the order and its domestic economy. These buildings were the scenes of almost beehive-like activity.

The interior arrangement of stairways, halls, and rooms reveal both thoughtful planning and excellent craftsmanship. There was constant awareness of functional uses of the buildings. Beyond these facts there is an astonishing amount of lightness and cheerfulness in what was designed to be a plain if not austere setting. In an angular early nineteenth century fashion plus a certain religious severity the Shakers achieved a kind of sedate grace if not always of form then of internal order.

In one area Micajah Burnett gave way to an almost intoxicated spasm of romance, and that was in designing the stairways of the buildings. The twin spiral stairways in the Trustees' House, now being used as the inn of the village, is a marvelous example of suspension, as much so as that of the bridge of the Meeting House. Both the superstructure of the stairwell and the curved railings reflect a mature knowledge of geometrical angles and curvatures. More difficult to achieve was the bending of the

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cherry rails to conform with graceful pre-set symmetry of three flights of winding stairs without use of sophisticated tools and bending processes. The stairs are tied into the building at the foot and landing stages, and at the top.

Whether or not Burnett was responsible for the internal decor of the Shaker buildings is not clearly known. Perhaps the scheme which came to prevail was adopted partly out of the tenets of the order, and partly because of the exigencies of housekeeping in which so many people were involved. A special tone of blue paint, prescribed from New Lebanon, was used throughout as trim of some of the buildings. Walls were painted an off-white or were whitewashed. Floors were plain with perhaps some kind of waxing material spread on them. Walls of the rooms were lined with peg boards from which extended turned knobs or wooden brackets of uniform length and design. These were used for hanging candle sconces, clothing, utensils, and even pieces of furniture. The rooms further revealed the desire to keep good housekeeping order by the location of traditional closets or wardrobes.

Outside trim of the buildings revealed the same meticulous care to details as the interior decor. Rain water was caught in gutters and drained down into stone "rain catchers" which delivered the water well away from the buildings. Stone steps, window copings, iron guard rails, all were solidly constructed as were the walkways leading into the buildings.

Thus the physical community of the Shakers became a model of rural farm planning and building. Whatever their Kentucky neighbors thought about the strangeness of their religious practices and their social philosophy, they were thoroughly convinced that the Believers were industrious, ingenious, and orderly. At no time in Kentucky history has any group of people demonstrated a greater capability of using raw native materials to achieve such notable results. This fact alone served as an invaluable demonstration by examples as to what native people could achieve by applying their wits and their energy.

All of this tireless activity was carried on at a time when the Shakers were being most devout in their physically vigorous ceremonies of worship. The dances, although a form of spiritual releasement, were taxing of human energy, and it is hard to imagine a workman taking vigorous part in the religious exercises and then being in condition to perform efficiently the next day in the handling of heavy building materials. This was also a period in which much administrative and counseling energy was expended on bringing converts into submission with the common weal, and in proselyting for new members.

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Shakertown at Pleasant Hill

8. Significance: (1)

HISTORY:

(abridged and adapted from National Survey Theme XXII,  
"Social and Humanitarian Movements")

The Shakers or the "United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing", a religious group which at its height numbered no more than 6,000 adherents in some eighteen communities, was a product of the country's religious liberty, individualism, and idealism. The Pleasant Hill Society was a direct product of the phenomenal Great Revival in the trans-Allegheny west, of the 1800's. News of the Great Revival in the west with its consequent fracturing of old denominations reached the Shaker leaders in upstate New York, and they determined that Shakerism could attain territorial expansion. Accordingly, on January 1, 1805, three Shaker missionaries were sent to the people of Kentucky and adjacent states. Within a year conversions were made that led directly to the founding of three Shaker villages: Union Village, Ohio and South Union and Pleasant Hill, Kentucky.

A large number of buildings of the Pleasant Hill community remain and, as a result of the present restoration efforts, are almost completely free from modern intrusions. Shakertown at Pleasant Hill is in the heart of the rich lands of the Kentucky Bluegrass. It is located 24 miles from Lexington and eight from Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

The communal living aspect of the Shaker faith links it with other such experiments based on religious, economic, or social principles. The Shakers were probably the most successful and certainly the longest lived of such societies.

The communal life of Pleasant Hill was based on both agriculture and handicraft industries. After the theocracy had been fully established, all property was held in common, and only personal effects could be taken away by a departing member. The community was divided into three large "families" with residences for from 60-100 persons each, all of whom were expected to live a completely celibate life. The East Family Dwelling House was constructed in 1817, the Center Family Dwelling House in 1824-1834, and the West Family Dwelling House in 1821.

In addition, smaller West Lot and North Lot houses were built for the "gathering" and novitiate orders, and there was a residence for children and a trustees' house. Each of the families had its allotted fields and gardens. There was central purchasing and a division according to need and on a per capita basis. The Shakers came to be regarded as excellent agriculturists.

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Shakertown at Pleasant Hill

8. Significance (2)

HISTORY: CONT.

Forests along the Kentucky River supplied wood for such sales items as cooperage ware, fine cherry, walnut, and tulip poplar furniture made chiefly for home use.

The oldest building still extant in Shakertown is the Farm Deacon's Shop built in 1809. By 1820 the artisans and mechanics at Pleasant Hill had built a sawmill, grist mill, fulling or clothing mill, linseed oil mill, a blacksmith and wagon shop, and shops for the joiners, hatters, and shoemakers. The mills and shops supplied not only the domestic needs of the community, but also of the surrounding neighborhood. They also turned out a variety of small handicrafts. The sisters created many things such as woolen goods, silk scarfs, etc. for domestic use.

In scientific farming and animal husbandry, the community set high standards of excellence, and it was in this field that the Shakers made their greatest contribution to the contemporary life. The Shakers looked upon farming as more than an occupation. In an evil world they believed that farming alone offered man a life of purity and simplicity apart from the corruption of trade and commerce.

With the Civil War began the slow decline of Pleasant Hill. The war depleted the society by twenty-two percent of its membership; worldliness and insubordination were also an outgrowth of the times. The loss of Southern markets was a serious economic blow to which they were unable to adjust. Financial affairs fell into inept and incompetent hands. The post-war years of declining farm prices and industrial growth made the Shakers vulnerable to losses, and a shrinking labor force worsened their predicament. In 1910 only a handful of members remained, and the society was dissolved. Shakertown's remaining 1,800 acres were deeded to a private citizen, in trust, with the condition that he would care for the remaining residents as long as they lived.

Although Pleasant Hill was one of the largest of the Shaker colonies, it was far from the most important. The sect's headquarters at Mt. Lebanon, New York, was the primary center, with Union Village, Ohio, next. Shakertown is, however, an interesting example of the agrarian, self-sufficient, Utopian community of the 19th century.

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Shakertown at Pleasant Hill

8. Significance (3)

**HISTORY: CONT.**

Today, a group known as Shakertown at Pleasant Hill, Inc., has undertaken the restoration of the historic village. The stone Center Family House was the first to be restored. It houses exhibits which tell the Shaker story; several of the rooms are furnished in the original style, and others are used to illustrate various arts and crafts of the Shakers.

Most of the major buildings in Shakertown have by now been restored, although a few of the minor ones are still awaiting restoration. Pleasant Hill is a good example of Shaker craftsmanship. Its style is plain, but with a purity of form that makes the buildings both comfortable and handsome.

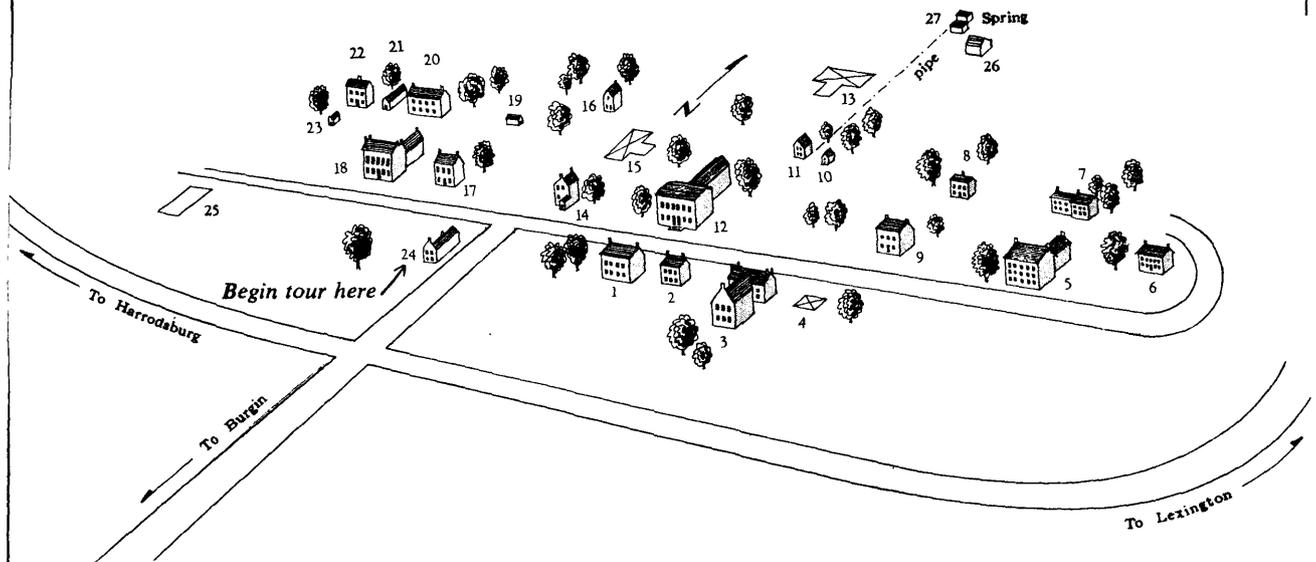
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Plot Plan of Shakertown at Pleasant Hill



1. MEETING HOUSE. 1820.  
*Meeting Room on exhibition.*
2. MINISTRY'S WORK SHOP. 1820.  
*Lodgings for guests.*
3. TRUSTEES' OFFICE. 1839.  
*Meals and lodgings.*
4. Site of the POST OFFICE. 1848.
5. EAST FAMILY DWELLING HOUSE. 1817.  
*Lodgings for guests.*
6. EAST FAMILY SISTERS' SHOP. 1855.  
*Spinning and weaving shop.  
Lodgings for guests on second floor.*
7. EAST FAMILY WASH HOUSE. Circa 1825. East wing added in 1849.
8. COOPER'S SHOP. 1847.
9. EAST FAMILY BRETHREN'S SHOP. 1845.  
*Carpenters' tools and farm implements.  
Lodgings for guests on second floor.*
10. SHOEMAKER'S SHOP. Circa 1835.
11. WATER HOUSE. 1833.
12. CENTER FAMILY DWELLING HOUSE. 1824-1834.  
*Shaker rooms and exhibits.*
13. Foundation of the CENTER FAMILY WASH HOUSE. 1829. South wing added in 1843.
14. FARM DEACON'S SHOP. 1809.  
*Craft and Gift Shop.*
15. Foundation of the OLD CENTER FAMILY HOUSE. 1813.
16. MINISTRY'S OLD YELLOW FRAME SHOP. Circa 1812.
17. OLD STONE SHOP. 1811.
18. WEST FAMILY DWELLING HOUSE. 1821.  
*Lodgings for guests.*
19. PRIVY.
20. WEST FAMILY SISTERS' SHOP. 1844.
21. PRESERVE HOUSE. 1859.
22. WEST FAMILY WASH HOUSE. 1842.
23. DRY HOUSE. Circa 1840.
24. CARPENTERS' SHOP. 1815.  
*Information Center and Visitors' orientation.*
25. GRAVEYARD. 1811.
26. TANYARD BRICK SHOP. 1823.
27. WATERWORKS.  
*First west of Alleghenies.*