



SHADY AVE

Highlighting the News and Lifestyles of Pittsburgh's East End, Fox Chapel and Oakmont

HOLIDAY 2022

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HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

Your Guide to Seasonal
Activities in Our Area



Christmas at Kerr

Kerr Memorial Museum
celebrates the holiday season,
and its 20th year, in style —

Victorian style. BY CINDY ALEXANDER

Christmas at Kerr

Volunteers at Kerr Memorial Museum are getting ready for the Christmas season, which is highlighted by two candlelight tours, along with scheduled private tours, aimed to show visitors how the holidays were celebrated during Victorian times.

The museum, located in a residential section of Oakmont, reflects life as it was lived by a small-town doctor and his family.

“We are showing the house as if it was the years between 1890 to 1910,” says Jane Foster, a Kerr board member, volunteer, and longtime resident of Oakmont whose grandparents lived across the street from the Kerr home. “The family wasn’t wealthy. Doctors did not make a large salary at that time. So we are showing what a typical middle-class family lived like during that time.”





The parlor, with piano and tree.



The dining room table, set for the holiday.

Christmas at Kerr

Kerr is run by volunteers, young and old, who take on the important task of upkeeping the 1897 home. They also prepare it for different seasons, including Christmas.

The Kerr home, located at 402 Delaware Avenue, was built for Dr. Thomas R. Kerr, in an era when doctors made house calls by horse and buggy. He lived there with wife, Jessie, and their daughter, Virginia. Dr. Kerr passed away in 1931, and Jessie and Virginia stayed in the home. After Jessie's death in 1953, Virginia continued living there while she taught English at what was then Oakmont High School.

Virginia, who died in 1994, bequeathed the home and its furnishings to Oakmont to be used in memory of her father.

Since the museum opened, Janet Shoop played a key role as volunteer and board president. Shoop died in late October. "Virginia believed in historical integrity," she said in an interview over the summer. "The windows are original, the floors are original, except in the kitchen where they needed replacement for structural issues."

Although loved and taken care of by Virginia and her family for years, the house needed to have some improvements and repairs done once the borough took ownership. Additionally, some features of the home that had been updated for convenience were restored back to their original builds to reflect the times of the Victorian age.

To ensure the museum's historical accuracy and period details, the Kerr brought on interior designer Anne Genter and antiques dealer Michael Malley, who both took measures to ensure the home mirrored the Victorian era.

After about eight years of work, the museum opened for business in 2002.

Since its opening, except during the pandemic, the Kerr Museum has held tours throughout the year, celebrating holidays like July Fourth and Halloween, teaching visitors and student groups about daily life in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

During the holiday season, the Kerr museum will be bedecked with Victorian-style Christmas trees, Santa's bag brimming with period toys, wrapped gifts, a dining table set for the holidays, and festive decorations. During



Dr. Kerr's office.



The kitchen pantry.



A bedroom with gifts for the wrapping.

the live reenactments, December 2 and 9, visitors learn of the traditions most families would take part in each year, such as the Victorian kissing ball, the yule log, Christmas crackers, and what a Victorian Christmas dinner would include. They will also hear Christmas carols and stories told by actors playing Dr. Kerr, his family, and their beloved maid, Daisy.

“Essentially, when they come for this candlelight tour, they will meet the family, including Virginia as a young woman,” said Foster.

Although the reenactments will only happen during the two candlelight tours, which sell out quickly, private tours will be booked throughout the holiday season. The tours will include much of the same information, as a member of the Kerr Museum team walks visitors through the home, telling stories and answering questions along the way.

The Kerr Museum not only offers a step back in time to see how life was more than 100 years ago, it also gives visitors the chance to appreciate the work of a team of hardworking volunteers who maintain this beloved historical gem.

Tickets may be reserved by calling the Kerr Museum at 412-826-9295. Additional information can be found at kerrmuseum.com. SA

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