Johnnycake Village

Produced by: Eden Valley Enterprises
For: The Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area
1977 - 1979
Johnnycake Village was first produced in 1977 for the National Park Service at The Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area. As an outdoor, living history program, Johnnycake Village re-created a mythical canal town as it might have existed on the Western Reserve during the 1800's. Visitors to the Village took part in major events in the building of our country as they became involved in debates over whether or not to build a canal, helped rescue a runaway slave or celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the State of Ohio. During its three years, eight different scenarios and two Christmas programs were developed by EVE's director and 15 actors. Over 15,000 people relived history at the Village.
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PRESENTS

JOHNNYCAKE VILLAGE~
(A Canal Town Revisited)

A LIVING HISTORY EXPERIENCE

Produced by EDEN VALLEY ENTERPRISES

PROGRAM SERIES...
June 30 to September 5, 1977
IN THE VILLAGE

Welcome to Johnnycake Village!

We invite you to journey back in time to the 1820’s to a mythical village that may have existed in Ohio’s Western Reserve. Here you will meet and be able to talk to the people who moved from “the crowded East to the Western wilderness”.

During 1820, the canal issue is the most explosive topic of the day. You may be in the village during a town meeting when heated debates erupt between villagers who are for the canal and those who are against it. Governor Ethan Allen Brown will make a visit to Johnnycake to present his views on the topic.

In 1825, the canal began. You may join the townspeople in the commencement ceremonies as they remove the first shovelful of ground. Governors Clinton, from New York, and Brown, from Ohio, Orator Thomas Ewing and canal commissioner Alfred Kelley will be on hand for the festivities.

By 1826, the canal construction is well underway. Interesting “characters” find their way into Johnnycake Village. Medicine men and bounty hunters come through town disrupting the village calm.

Finally it is 1827 and the canal is ready to open its first section between Akron and Cleveland. Join in the celebration of the opening with Alfred Kelley.

We encourage you to fully participate in these events. Express your opinion in the debate over the canal, enjoy the foot races and hay mazes, join in the celebration of the first digging and consequently, the opening of the canal! Most importantly, get to know the people of the village — talk to them, and live with them!

Johnnycake Village will be open Thursday through Sunday afternoons from June 30th till September 4th and on the Fourth of July and Labor Day, September 5th. We hope you will visit us often!
JOHNNYCAKE VILLAGE

THE SCENE
The small canal town of Johnnycake adjacent to the Ohio and Erie Canal.

THE TIME
Approximately 150 years ago.

TOWNSPEOPLE
Elizabeth Mills (1802, '25, '27) ........................................ Jackie Chesney
Rebecca Schmidt (1826) ............................................. Jackie Chesney
Debra Goodson (1820-27) ........................................... Debra K. Gemind
Carole Goodson (1820, '25, '27) .................................. Carole Geraci
Rachel Johnston (1826) ................................................ Carole Geraci
Governor Brown (1820) ................................................ John Houser
Governor Clinton (1825) ............................................. John Houser
Jacob Brown and Michael O’Reiley (1826) ...................... John Houser
Governor Tiffin (1827) ................................................ John Houser
Luke Mansfield (1820, '26) ........................................... Kelly Lawrence
Alfred Kelley (1825, '27) ............................................. Kelly Lawrence
Essie Hopes (1820, '25, '27) ......................................... Sandra Helene Melton
Thomas Goodson (1820, '25, '27) ................................. Derek Schneider
Jack Smith (1826) ..................................................... Derek Schneider
Obadiah Quiqlem (1820 - 27) ....................................... Kem Schneider
Ebenezer Mills (1820, '25, '27) .................................... Rick Simmons
Shawn Behen (1826) ................................................... Rick Simmons
Jane Merriweather (1820 - 27) .................................... Jane Spencer
Sarah Comstock (1820 - 27) ......................................... Bette Lou Versaci
Nathaniel Goodson (1820, '27) .................................... Richard L. Weisheimer
Thomas Ewing (1825) ................................................ Richard L. Weisheimer
William Jones (1826) ................................................. Richard L. Weisheimer
Jonathan Schmidt (1820 - 27) .................................... Anthony Weinert

Special Thanks To
Dr. Mary Ann Fruth
JOHNNYCAKE VILLAGE

Produced for the National Park Service by
Eden Valley Enterprises
6342 Sunset Drive
Garfield Heights, Ohio 44125

Director ...................... P. K. “Kem” Schneider, Jr.
Production Manager ............... Bette Lou Versaci
Costumer ...................... Shirley Kovacs
Costumer ...................... Herb Reszka
Production Staff .......... Carola Bamberger, David Bamberger
Joseph D. Kern, Jim Lawrence
Josephine Lawrence, Joy Lawrence

For the National Park Service
Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area
501 West Streetsboro Road
Peninsula, Ohio 44264

William C. Birdsell, Superintendent;
Robert E. Holmes, Management Assistant

The National Park Service is pleased to bring this unique production of JOHNNYCAKE VILLAGE to the American public as a part of its celebration of the Ohio and Erie Canal Sesquicentennial.

The National Park idea is a legacy of our Nation, an historic outgrowth of the democratic ideals of opportunity and equality for all. A quotation from the Yellowstone Act, carved above the Park’s North Portal, clearly states the intent of Congress in establishing all national parks: “For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People”. Today, the National Park System numbers nearly 300 natural, historical, and recreational places, touching every region of the country and nearly every chapter of United States History. These parks and the associated national landmarks preserve the diversity of the original American landscape and pay tribute to the many peoples and cultures that have shaped America and its people.

The National Park Service hopes your visit to the 19th century town of JOHNNYCAKE VILLAGE will enable you to obtain a better understanding of the people and the activities of the early settlers of the Cuyahoga Valley.

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Johnnycake Village’s First Season

Four years in the life of the Ohio-Erie Canal were presented during the first season:

• A day in 1820 when the idea of the canal in the state of Ohio is being discussed
• July 4, 1825 – the groundbreaking ceremony for the Ohio-Erie Canal
• A day in 1826 – town life during the digging of the canal
• July 4, 1827 – The opening celebration of the Ohio-Erie Canal
During the following years, Johnnycake Village presented additional years in the life of the town including:

1833: the impact of the Leonid Meteor Shower in the Western Reserve.
1840: William Henry Harrison's Campaign for President
1844: A run-away slave comes through town
Johnnycake Village Scenes
Paul K. Schneider as Obadiah Quigley
Debra Gemind as Mrs. Goodson
Derek Schneider as Jack Smith
Jackie Chesney as Elizabeth Mills
Dennis Wemm as Nathanial Goodson
Luke Mansfield (Ken Schworm) gets ready for a celebration
Carole Goodson (Carole Geraci) makes a friend
Carole Goodson and friend at the General Store
Luke Mansfield (Kelly Lawrence) and Jack Smith (Derek Schneider) in the General Store
The Villagers discuss the benefits of building the canal by their town.
The Villagers at a town meeting.
A day in 1826 -
The Canallers take a day off! Gamblers, Con Men and "Ladies of the Afternoon" come to the Village
1826 -
The Con Men arrive!
Debra Beck (Debra Gemind) – a “Lady Of The Afternoon” – plans her revenge on the Con Men
The Con Men get conned by the Villagers!
Townspeople gather in front of the General Store
John Houser as Jacob Brown teaches the children about Ohio's statehood.
The children learn about Ohio's statehood during a Fourth of July celebration.
Getting ready to muster during the Fourth of July Celebration
Getting ready for the Flag raising on the Fourth of July
Flag raising on the Fourth of July
1844: A Runaway Slave comes to town and the Villagers meet to discuss a plan
Willie Womac
(*Jeff Bivens*) is
the escaped slave.
The Ladies disguise the Male Runaway as a Woman and lead “her” out of town.
The Ladies of the Village have a sewing bee
Governor Ethan Allan Brown (*John Houser*) visits the town
The Ladies plan a reception for Governor Ethan Allan Brown
Christmas at Johnnycake Village

The villagers celebrate with Reverend Schmidt who puts a Christmas Tree up. This is the first Christmas Tree the villagers have seen. After decorating the tree with apples, yarn dolls, and popcorn strings, they listen to the Reverend read the story of the birth of Christ and then all join hands to sing “Silent Night” together.
Getting ready to decorate the Christmas Tree
Decorating the Christmas Tree
Decorating the Christmas Tree
Johnnycake Village makes the news
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The good old days came alive in park

The Cuyahoga Valley National Park has really outdone itself with the opening this summer of Johnny Cake Village in Peninsula.

Johnny Cake is a recreation of a town as it might have existed in Ohio's Western Reserve during the 1820's and the building of the Ohio canal.

Reliving the opening day of the canal, with the speeches and festivities with "town people" like widower Merriweather (played by Jane Spencer) and town drunk, Obadiah Quigley (Kem Schneider), is an experience no history book can match.

Thank you, National Park Service, for telling it like it was.

GREG CZNADEL, 13401 Terminal Ave.
Experiment in the Woods

The farmer complains to the little boy about how difficult it is to clear his land of tree stumps. "Why don't you use a bulldozer?" asks the first-grader. The farmer pauses for a moment, then answers, "What would I want with a sleeping bull?"

It's not really a put-on. The farmer "believes" he is back in the nineteenth century, back in the Western Reserve pre-Civil War wilderness. The farmer is an actor with Eden Valley Enterprises, the group that produces "Johnny cake Village" at the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

And for ninety minutes on a summer afternoon or a midsummer evening, the group of over one dozen actors asks the audience to believe it, too. They invite their twentieth-century guests back in time to the small, mythical, but typical Ohio Canal town of Johnny cake Village, which stands in a clearing, down a path from the Happy Days Information Center, on Route 305 in northern Summit County. There they enact one of five scenarios depicting special events: the 1840 Presidential campaign, the formation of an anti-slavery society, the arrival of a meteor shower, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Ohio statehood and a wild and woolly payday.

The audience becomes part of the action as the "townpeople" draw it into a loosely structured scenario, same script. It is improvisational theater of the most grueling sort, because when the audience enters the scene, the time frame is often disrupted.

"Are you all college students?" ask many inquiring visitors. They are politely informed that Mr. Goodson, an attorney representing the Connecticut Land Company, is the only college graduate in the small frontier town. People who persist in raising nineteenth-century questions are referred to Sarah Comstock, the hotel clerk.

"Sarah Comstock is a fringe character, she's in the twilight zone between the 1800s and 1970s, and acts as a liaison," says Bette Lou Versaci, production manager and the actress who portrays Comstock. "If you have questions about the production or a real problem, such as 'Where is the bathroom?', Sarah will give you real answers."

"We break down the audience's resistance in the first ten or fifteen minutes by getting them actively involved," says director and general manager Ken Schneider.

"We ask the women and children to decorate the meetinghouse for the Fourth of July celebration, while we line up the men to march in the flag-raising ceremony."

Now in its third year, and its second season at Happy Days (the first season was spent in a searching field transected by a decoratively mild-looking creek that twice flooded over, "Johnny cake Village" has entertained over 10,000 people. Admission to the village is free and there are five different story lines, so many people return often during the summer. Preparation to greet this throng of visitors (the company has played to as little as four and as many as 500 people in one day) begins intensively in May. After selecting the actors, Schneider puts them through day-long rehearsals covering three different areas: acting techniques, character building, holding the time frame, history lessons and work on the actual scenarios.

The outdoor setting creates problems for the actors. Garter snakes and daddy-longlegs inhabit the set, and the modern sounds of dirt bikes, planes and cars must be ignored. Despite these difficulties, the show has been criticized for being too easy, too juvenile — in two short words, Mickey Mouse. Schneider and Versaci jump on these derivative words and turn them into compliments by praising Walt Disney, Disneyland and the slick, polished family entertainment practiced there.

"Our purpose is to entertain and educate at the same time," says Schneider. "We treat a lot of things lightly because it's easier for the audience to cope with that. You learn more with laughter, but it doesn't make it any less important."

"We're going after the middle audience, not the heads of the children and not below the interest of intelligent adults."

This summer a daily discussion series on Ohio history conducted by Schneider, Versaci and University of Akron professor R. Roger Grant will follow the 1 p.m. performances. During the school year, Eden Valley Enterprises offers two programs: "Meet the People: Ohio Pioneers" and "Meet the People: Great Americans." Both programs use the "Johnny cake" technique of meeting historical characters within their own time frame and environment.

"There's no better way to learn history," says Versaci. "When I saw Thomas Jefferson's house, I wanted to see people in it."
Johnnycake Village, A Canal Town Revisited

Johnnycake Village is Eden Valley's first project. Sponsored by the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, a new area in the National Park Service, as part of the sesquicentennial celebration of the opening of the Ohio-Erie Canal, Johnnycake Village is a re-enactment of a period in American History that was dominated by a new fangled method of transportation — the Canal.

Turning back the clock to this more romantic time, Eden Valley will present an opportunity for today's Americans to find out what life was like "back then" and maybe even change the course of history. Visitors to the Village can take part in a major event in the building of our country. Johnnycake Village is a busy place with debates on the advantages and disadvantages of building the canal at all; arguments take place between citizens of one city and townspeople of another over which town will be on the route of the canal. Canal builders may find themselves subject to many tongue lashings from various clergy and law people who see them as immoral; new industries will develop with the canal; tourism will increase with the new method of transportation; runaway slaves may find their way into the village and the impending threat of the railroad to the canal will be felt by all the villagers.

Future plans for Eden Valley include eventual full-time operation as a learning-cultural center. During the next few years there are plans to take Johnnycake Village and other similar living history presentations into area schools.

These presentations will be supplemented by classes about the historical period, clothing and tools of the time, etc. Within the educational activities, the needs and desires of the students and teachers involved will be the primary consideration. The performance activities will grow to include a theatre, concerts, dance shows, and art exhibits. The next few years will concentrate on the development of a community theatre. The theatre (as well as other performance areas) will work in conjunction with the classes and as a supplemental experience for them.

If you are interested in joining the Eden Valley Co. or would like more information, you may call Berle Lou Versallie at 662-5777.

Joseph Korn, 12329 Darlington Aveneue, phone 662-5343, is vice president of this organization, and he too may be reached for information.
Actors and audiences are reliving Canal Days

By BARBARA WEISS

In the midst of a thicket in Boston Twp., history is being repeated.

There, in the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, is a community called Johnnycake Village. It is a mythical village but the events portrayed are based on fact.

Twelve actors and actresses dressed in costumes of the 1830's move about the village in a scenario that depicts one of four dates during Ohio's Canal Days.

Visitors to the village might be catapulted back to a day in 1829 when the building of a canal is first proposed. Or they might arrive on July 4, 1825, when the groundbreaking ceremony for the Ohio and Erie Canal is taking place.

If the players are portraying a day in 1829, spectators will observe town life during the digging of the canal. A celebration of the canal's opening takes place when the date depicted is July 4, 1827.

The four performances will be rotated every Thursday through Sunday from now until Labor Day weekend. There are performances at 2 and 3:30 on each of the days, with the final enactment scheduled for Labor Day.

Because Johnnycake Village is meant to be a living history experience, the audience is encouraged to carry on a dialogue with the performers. Visitors also can participate in games of the era, such as Duck and Drake, King George's Men, Soap, Rachel, Rachel and haymazes.

Currently, the outdoor drama has six sets—a meeting house, hotel, two homes, a general store and a law office. The village will expand in future years, according to the National Park Service, and eventually will have a coterie of craftsmen.

This is the sesquicentennial years of the Ohio Canal and visitors are given beautifully designed booklets that capsize the canal's history. Admission to the village is free. It is on Stanford Rd., one mile north of Boston Mills Rd.
Eden Valley continues to present living history programs as well as murder mysteries, reader's theatre programs, plays and other event programming. The company has produced special programs for a number of local organizations including The Tuscarawas Historical Society, The Lorain County Metro Parks, North Coast Harbor, The Steamship William G. Mather, Roscoe Village, The Great Lakes Historical Society and the Western Reserve Historical Society.

Eden Valley is a not-for-profit organization under section 501(c)(3)

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