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DECORATING FOR A VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS

Berry Manor Inn offers Mantles in the Mansion and other tips for celebrating the holidays with Victorian customs

Rockland, ME – Berry Manor Inn owner, Cheryl Michaelsen wouldn't admit it, but with all the research she's done on Victorian tradition for the inn, many consider her an expert especially when it comes to celebrating a Victorian Christmas. Her Victorian-style inn offers the ideal backdrop to showcase venerated Victorian traditions throughout the year. However during the holidays the pomp and hospitality of this bygone era is resplendent in what Down East Magazine has referred to as "The WOW House" and TripAdvisor named Berry Manor Inn among the top 10 inns in the U.S. in 2008. Visit Berry Manor Inn during Historic Inns of Rockland, Maine's Holiday House Tour held each year on the Sunday after Thanksgiving (November 30, 2008, November 29, 2009), where among other ideas, you'll learn first hand all about many Victorian traditions of yesteryear. The Holiday House Tour is part of Rockland's Festival of Lights. During the Holiday House Tour, held from 1-5pm, Historic Inns of Rockland will feature workshops including Gingerbread House Making, Victorian Customs for Christmas, and Package Wrapping Workshops, along with refreshments, cooking demonstrations and tours of lovely historic inns during this event. Additionally, this year, turn to the Historic Inns of Rockland for tips on how to easily feed a crowd on Christmas morning and not miss the presents and fun.

During the Victorian era, commonly considered from the mid 1800's to the early 1900's, strides were made in communication and industrialization making it possible for traditions from other countries to be popularized and even mass-produced in the United States. Embedded in the Victorian psyche was the need to keep up and surpass friends' and family expectations for socializing, decorating and succeeding in general. Thus, creating an environment where others could watch, socialize and share traditions of others was key. Understanding this, Berry Manor Inn has captured many of the Victorian traditions to share and celebrate with guests throughout the holiday season.

Peppermint pigs – The pig was a symbol of good health, happiness and prosperity in Victorian times. Thus, even today as tradition dictates, after the holiday meal, the candy peppermint pigs are broken and shared by all in hopes of good fortune. First created in Saratoga Springs, NY, Berry Manor Inn purchases Peppermint Pigs for guests from SaratogaSweets.com, which claims to be the only place still making these Victorian confections, since 1880.

(please turn for more...)

Hanging a pickle on the tree – According to the Victorian myth an orphan wandered into a pub whereupon he was kidnapped and thrown into a pickle barrel. St. Nick came to his rescue, making the pickle a symbol of good luck. It was German tradition, popularized in Victorian times, to hang a pickle ornament on the Christmas tree for good luck. The child that was first to find the pickle was rewarded with an extra present. Look carefully, and you will find the pickle ornament on the tree at Berry Manor Inn.

Christmas crackers – These whimsical toys were one custom that dawned during Victorian times. In the 1860's a London confectioner designed a tube shaped object and filled it with sweets and toys, then tied it at both ends and offered it for entertainment at the dinner table. Later, inspired by the flames of the hearth, a popping noise was added, lending to the name "crackers". In keeping with tradition, usually a hat and candy are still hidden within the crackers. You'll find a basket of Christmas crackers as gifts for guests at the Berry Manor Inn throughout the holidays.

The Christmas Maze – In keeping with another Victorian tradition, Berry Manor Inn sets up a "maze" game in the Children's Room, replicating how many Victorian children found their Christmas treasures. Tradition holds that each child was assigned to a different color ribbon, and told to follow it through the maze of intertwined ribbons to their gift. The Christmas Maze is available for viewing at Berry Manor Inn during the Holiday House Tour.

The Upside Down Christmas Tree – It was a common tradition in Victorian times to display a "table top" tree in the parlor. Often the trees were too big for the table so the top would be cut off and hung upside down in another part of the house. This afforded the opportunity to have another tree to display the many handmade treasures collected over the years. Look for the upside down tree in the entry to Berry Manor Inn.

When asked about some ideas for holiday decorating with a Victorian flair, Cheryl Michaelson has plenty of advice, ranging from mantles of the mansion to tree décor.

Tips for Victorian Decorating:

- Cover the top of the mantle with boughs of greens. Cluster and arrange pineapple, oranges, apples, pomegranates and berries or grapes to create beautiful color. Use boxes or styrofoam (hidden by the greenery) to arrange the fruits at different heights. Embellish with pearly beads, tassels and ribbon.

Set up a grouping of five to seven like-colored pillar candles on assorted blocks of wood at different heights on the mantle. Wrap greens around them and lay white lights throughout the greens. Concentrate the string of lights through and around the candles to create a glow of light. This is particularly attractive if you have a mirrored mantle or place an antique mirror on the mantle behind the candles

A beautiful simple mantle arrangement can be created by displaying gold-sprayed pine cones set on greens with white lights mixed throughout.

(please turn for still more Victorian traditions...)

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- For a monochromatic display, lay gold lamay ribbon across the top with assorted loops and dips, or add several gold cherubs set in amongst the green. For a burst of color add a grouping of red cardinals, peacock feathers or a spray of silk roses off to one side of the mantle.
- You can create a beautiful Victorian Christmas tree with garlands of pearls, silk roses, feathered birds, clip-on candles and a predominance of burgundy, pinks and cream reflected in the bulbs and repeated throughout the design.
- Don't pass up the front stairway as an opportunity to show off Victorian decor. This is often one of the first things guest see, and offers the perfect setting for your garland, thick burgundy ribbons, greenery and ornaments.

Other photos for this story – available in low-res only.



For more information on Berry Manor Inn or the Holiday House tour, visit www.HistoricInnsOfRockland.com or call 877-ROC-INNS (877-762-4667) to reserve tickets.

