

# Museum Evaluation: Naper Settlement, Naperville, IL

Naper Settlement, 523 S. Webster Street, Naperville, IL 60540, [www.napersettlement.org](http://www.napersettlement.org), RENA TAMAYO-CALABRESE, President & CEO; DINA SPOERL, Exhibits Team Leader; ANDREA FIELD, Curator. Evaluated April 7, 2021 by Al Watts.



Naper Settlement is an outdoor museum of nineteenth-century midwest American village life located near downtown Naperville, IL, a western suburb of Chicago. Established in 1969, the thirteen acre property contains thirty historical structures highlighted by the Martin Mitchell Mansion, gifted to Naperville by Caroline Martin Mitchell in 1936. Approximately half of the buildings in the museum are original structures, most from downtown Naperville moved to the site in the 1970's. The buildings are scattered about the property connected by brick paths so it is not laid out as a model of village. Only a few of the buildings are open to view their interior, but most can be peered at through windows. There are replicas of items

that would have been in these structures to give a greater sense of how lives were lived in them.

The museum is focused on "connecting visitors to Naperville's history through engaging, unique experiences."<sup>1</sup> There are two primary ways the museum accomplishes this mission effectively. First are the buildings as exhibits. There is a variety of structures, includes homes from a log cabin to a mansion, three churches, and several shops. Second are the guides and re-enactors. Tour guides are all dressed in accurate period attire and there are typically several re-enactors performing tasks such as printing and blacksmithing that visitors can observe.



As far as could be determined, the exhibits (in this case the buildings) were in good condition despite the often harsh Illinois weather. Many of them have been refurbished over the years and, despite some paint peeling, appear to be well-maintained. The grounds are also well-manicured giving the overall impression that the museum takes its appearance seriously.

Visitor flow is an open-concept. There are multiple wide brick paths one can take to visit all of the buildings and lots of space between buildings giving the museum the appearance of a park as much as a museum. The buildings are not placed in any particular order by date, usage, or significance so there is no progression one can logically follow. Part of this is due to placing the buildings where they would best fit but part appears to be by design to give the space a more

<sup>1</sup> "About Us," Naper Settlement, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.napersettlement.org/27/About>.