



A Day in Aurora: Oregon's First Commune

BY TAMARA MULDOON

In 1856, three years before Oregon statehood, Dr. Wilhelm Keil led about 250 German settlers from Missouri over the Oregon Trail to establish a Christian communal society. They built their town on 640 acres near the Pudding River in the Willamette Valley, naming it for Keil's daughter, Aurora.

The community thrived under Keil's guidance and its citizens' enterprising labors, expanding to 20,000 acres. Its success was partly due to being a convenient stage and railroad stop. However, after Keil died in 1877, the colony faltered. It disbanded in 1883, distributing its property to individual members.

The tiny village of Aurora—Oregon's first national historic district—is well worth a visit. First, stop at the Old Aurora Colony Museum, a complex of five historic structures that communicate the colonists' story—how they lived, worked and played. (Pick up the “Walk with Emma” self-guided walking tour brochure.)

One of America's top antiquing destinations, Aurora offers more than a dozen antique and collectible shops within a few blocks. Many are located in original colony buildings, lending an “old-time” atmosphere. While all have an assortment of furniture, household goods, glassware and artwork, some specialize in particular items, too.

Check out Aurora Colony General Store for jewelry and

silver. Among Main Street Mercantile's wares are rarer finds like player piano rolls, comic books and military insignia. Wildwest Antiques features Western artifacts, artwork, Native American items, old guns and taxidermy animals. Take a refreshment break at Christa's Café & Antiques or Scattercreek Junction. Both offer light fare, desserts and coffee along with antiques.

There's more than antiques here though. French Prairie Perennials sells seasonal plants, garden items, home décor, jewelry and gift items. Black Star Watercolor showcases original art by local and regional artists.

Schedule a behind-the-scenes tour at Pacific Hazelnut Candy Factory; then snag some treats in the gift shop. Relax awhile at Pheasant Run Winery's tasting room, located in a historic bank building. Learn about the bank's notorious past while sampling the broad range of wines.

For a pick-me-up, try White Rabbit Bakery for coffee, pastries or a light lunch. If you're really hungry, visit family-friendly Aurora Colony Pub for a delicious, hearty meal that will change your perception of “pub food.”

Located on Hwy. 99E, Aurora is about 30 minutes from Portland and Salem, a short distance from I-5. Lodging is available in nearby Woodburn or Wilsonville. To plan your Aurora discovery, go to auroracolony.com.