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MICHAEL MARTONE

NEW HARMONY

Here, the streets of this lovely village are lined with ginkgo trees (Ginkgo bilboa). Native to China, the trees, the oldest deciduous species in the world, were planted in the hundreds by the Harmonites, the first of two utopian settlements to occupy the town. The Harmonites believed in a multiplicity of times spending theirs in the precise measure of diurnal, lunar, tidal, seasonal, gestational cycles and their intersections with this place they call New Harmony. Notice the many ruins of their famous moon dials and inspect, in the museum (slight charge) the many menstruation logbooks. Today's town bustles with modern unreligious inhabitants routinely setting their wristwatches via a phone call to a recording, ignoring the seemingly irregular blasts emanating from the ancient automated Harmonite steam whistles. Every autumn, the town celebrates its festival. Bus loads of tourists, some coming from as far away as China, gather to witness the spontaneous falling of the ginkgo foliage. This phenomenon, still unexplained, cannot be predicted accurately. One can only estimate the narrow band of time when the slant of the sun, the temperature, the duration of starlight signals in the prehistoric trees, the simultaneous and complete release of every fan-like leaf.