Fall 2014

South Union Messenger (Fall 2014)

Kentucky Library Research Collections

Western Kentucky University, spcol@wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/su_messenger

Part of the Christian Denominations and Sects Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/su_messenger/62

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in South Union Messenger by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
ARCHAEOLOGY
PROJECT CONTINUES

Dr. Kim McBride recently led an archaeological investigation at South Union, focusing on the floor of the 1835 Smoke House. The 1930s-era concrete was removed in April, exposing the earthen surface within the work room on the first level of the building. Dr. McBride, her associates, and volunteers worked for two days to discover what evidence might have been left behind.

This room was originally used for butchering and for the preparation of the meat before it was hung in the room upstairs. The fireplace in the downstairs room supplied the second floor with smoke for flavoring the meat. Architecturally, this two-level smoke house arrangements seems to be rare, if not unique. It was not the only smoke house at South Union designed in this manner. In 1834 Isaac Newton Youngs referenced the smoke house at the 1825 Trustees Office, noting “I was very much delighted with the novelty of this—it was a 2 story building & the lower part is used for a shop and the chimney is so fixed that the smoke can all be let out of the chimney into the room or can be shut out.” The South Union smoke houses were, without a doubt, models of efficiency and cleanliness when compared to common regional examples.

When the Mt. Lebanon Ministry delivered an edict against the consumption of pork for the Shakers it was very difficult for South Union’s membership, made up primarily of Southerners, to let it go. For a number of years they complied, but continued to kill hogs and process pork for their hired help. In 1868 Elder Harvey Eades estimated that each hand consumed about 500 pounds of pork annually.

Discoveries included a brick drain on the north wall and evidence of arch kettles from the 1870s when it was converted to a kitchen for the making of fruit preserves. Also revealed was a deep layer of late 18th/early 19th century pottery fragments that pre-dated this structure.
SHAKER VALUES: EQUALITY

On Friday, June 29, 1883, the South Union Shakers were visited by Elizabeth Lyle Saxon. Elder Harvey Eades recorded that visit in Record D, simply:

Visitor. Mrs. E. L. Saxon, a lecturer on Women’s rights—a bright & sprightly & intelligent person.

Eades, who at age three had come to South Union in 1807 with his parents, was raised in a culture that demonstrated equality of the sexes. Male and female leaders governed Shaker villages on both a spiritual and a temporal basis. His complimentary journal entry speaks to that acceptance at a time when women’s rights was still in its infancy and by no means widely accepted. Susan B. Anthony’s failed right-to-vote amendment had been proposed just five years earlier.

Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, born in Greenville, Tennessee in 1832, was known as a gifted speaker, a prolific author, and a proponent of social reform. She spoke to large audiences across the nation and even accompanied Susan B. Anthony on a speaking tour through New England to raise awareness. Saxon died in Memphis in 1915, five years before the ratification of the 19th amendment.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Brent Gipson
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Jonathan Sprouse
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Judy Allen
Alvaton, Kentucky

Jan Zijlstra
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATION

Underwriting Events

Joe Neal Balance—$1,000.00 for sponsorship of “Shake&Stir” gala event
US Bank—$1,000.00 for sponsorship of “Shake&Stir” gala event
Van Meter Insurance—$1,000.00 for sponsorship of “Shake&Stir” gala event
Col. Robert and Cora Jane Spiller—$3,000.00 for sponsorship of “Music on the Farm” event
Auburn Leather—$500.00 for sponsorship of “Shakertown Revisited” Reunion
WRECC—$500.00 for sponsorship of Shaker Farm Day

In Memory

Col. Robert and Cora Jane Spiller—in memory of Bob Wright

General Support
Ridley Wills III—$1,000.00
Margy Thomas—$1,000.00
Ellen H. Martin—$1,000.00
May Dean Eberling—$50.00
Dorothy Earthman—$100.00
Martin Brown—$1,000.00
Ridley Wills II—$200.00
Ann V. Roberts—$100.00
US Bank—$100.00
Benjamin Page, Jr.—$1,000.00
Occasionally, new members who showed great promise at South Union were elevated quickly to positions of leadership, especially during the late 19th century when the village hierarchy was aging. Young converts who demonstrated energy and zeal were of particular interest to a community struggling for resurgence after the Civil War. One such example was Floyd Field.

In October of 1882 widower Floyd Field, age 27, was admitted to the South Union community, along with his 12-year-old daughter, Mary. Within two weeks Floyd’s father, a Methodist minister named Pletus Field, was also admitted. Floyd’s mother Hannah did not share her husband’s enthusiasm. The manuscript record of Pletus Field’s arrival noted that Hannah “holds back—not yet ready for the full cross.” (Record D, pg. 118)

Things had changed for the Field family by June 3, 1883 when Bro. Pletus was given the opportunity to speak on the Sabbath in South Union’s Meeting House. The journal keeper noted that other members of the Field family who were in attendance that day had also been admitted to the community, including Pletus’ wife Hannah, their son Frank, Frank’s wife Ella, and their two children.

Floyd Field must have made a good impression on South Union’s leadership as he was given the role of Elder for the community’s West Family in November 1883, just over a year after joining the Shakers. The appointment of Elder Field came at an exciting time for South Union. A new West House was under construction, the largest post-Civil War building project that the Shakers would undertake. Membership was on the rise and the future was beginning to look bright.

But the Field family soon began to disappoint. Pletus and Hannah Field announced “their intention to withdraw & go to the underworld” in March 12, 1884. (Record D, pg. 157) A few days later Elder Floyd Field left with Henrietta Holman to be married, prompting the journal keeper to write “I expected better things of Elder Floyd than this.” (Record D, pg. 159) To make matters worse, Floyd’s brother, Frank, left South Union with a team of horses and a wagon load of brooms. He was eventually apprehended and in January of 1885 was sentenced to the state penitentiary for three years. Frank wrote to the Shakers, bargaining that if they would sign a petition for his release and give him $100, he would tell them where the wagon and team were located. Letters also came from Frank’s father and brother but there is no evidence that the Shakers signed the petition. Elder Harvey Eades wrote in Record D, “What is best and proper to do is hard to decide ... who can say, nay, not I.”

Apparently there was no grudge. Pletus and Hannah Field eventually returned to South Union for yet another privilege, then left for good in early 1887. The Field family represents the lack of commitment of many of South Union’s later members, a stark contrast with the community’s fervent core that carried on valiantly into the early 20th century.
RESTORATION ON A SMALL SCALE

Soon after Oscar Bond took possession of the Shaker South Union Shaker village in 1922 he began hiring employees to cut timber and to maintain his livestock enterprise. The village buildings that were not destroyed were converted into living space for the families who worked for the Bonds. “Shakertown” became a community again, but this time inhabited by traditional families. One of Mr. Bond’s most important hires was a carpenter named Slim Trogden. A series of letters and drawings, received between 1985 and 1997, was the basis of much of the early restoration. Of particular interest were drawings (right) by Edna’s husband, Bill. His drafting expertise, coupled with the Zula and Edna’s collective memories, proved extremely helpful.

In 1988 a mantel was removed from the Trogden’s former living room fireplace, a mantel that oral history claimed Slim Trogden had taken from the abandoned Centre House in the 1930s. Preserved for research purposes, it remained in storage for over 25 years until this summer. Although its left “leg” had been completely destroyed by termites prior to its 1988 removal, our resident craftsman Roger Ryan agreed to take on the task of restoring the mantel (continued)

Ulysses “Slim” Trogden began converting the old Smoke and Milk House into a home for his family around 1931. Remodeling a structure that had been used as a smoke house and dairy required a great deal of work, but soon the first level accommodated a new living room, dining room and kitchen, and the second floor was adapted for two large bedrooms and a bathroom. Slim and Zula Trogden and their daughter, Edna, lived in the house until 1949, when Bond sold the property to the Catholic Church for the establishment of St. Maur’s Monastery.

Extensive research proceeded the restoration of the Smoke and Milk House, which began in 1988 thanks to funding from the Weyerhaeuser Company Foundation. One of the most important elements in the research process was written correspondence from Zula Trogden and her daughter, Edna Bowlds. A series of letters and drawings, received between 1985 and 1997, was the basis of much of the early restoration.
so that it could be put back into the Centre House. Recently completed, the restored mantle not only has its left leg back, but Roger has reproduced missing lengths of applied molding to match the original. It is restoration on a meticulous scale, but it allows us to learn even more about the South Union Shakers, their craftsmanship and their design sensibilities. Many thanks to Roger Ryan for sharing his expertise with the South Union Shaker Village.

Clockwise, above left is the mantel, soon after being removed from storage and still covered in many coats of white paint. Above right is the finished product, leaning against the fireplace from which it was removed in the 1930s. At left is a photograph that illustrates the melding of vintage and restored moldings, applied beneath the shelf and on three sides of the upright walnut legs. The mantel will soon be re-installed in its original location, after an absence of more than eighty years.

As a point of interest, Slim Trogden (right) was still living just outside of Auburn when Shakertown Revisited, Inc. purchased the Centre House in 1971. Deedy Hall enlisted the help of Mr. Trogden both as a consultant and a carpenter to help with early restoration process. Slim ended up “uni-doing” many of the changes that Oscar Bond had asked him to make in the 1930s.
RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Collection of Secondary Material for SUSV Library
Books on Shaker history and material culture from the library of the late Tim Bookout, early collector of Western Shaker furniture and the person responsible for the genre’s first major exhibit.

Donated by Jeff Ashworth, in memory of Tim Bookout

Collection of Primary and Secondary Material for SUSV Library
Printed material, both primary and secondary, pertaining to Shaker history and material culture, including books, pamphlets, artwork, correspondence and photographs. A variety of objects are also included. This collection of printed material is the largest ever contributed to South Union Shaker Village.

Donated by Dorothy Jones

Oval Box, ca. 1860
Classic Shaker oval box, cherry and pine, old finish, with long Kentucky history, possibly produced in the northeast and gifted to the Kentucky Shakers in the 19th century. The South Union Shakers, according to extant records, did not make oval boxes in their community.

Purchased with Acquisition Endowment funds

Photograph of South Union Cattle at Auction, ca. 1910
Historic photograph of South Union cattle being sold, probably at the Louisville Stockyard. The cattle were purchased for the Cincinnati Abattoir, a major meat processing facility from the mid-19th century through the early 20th. “W.T. Bates” refers to South Union member William T. Bates, the Shaker brother in charge of the community’s cattle business in its latter days. South Union’s purebred cattle industry was nearly 90 years old by the time this image was made, making it the longest lived of all the community’s commercial ventures. The Shakers’ venture began on June 1, 1822 with the purchase of their first Durham bull, Comet, from West Union, Indiana.

Purchased with Acquisition Endowment funds
A Word From the Director

Tommy Hines

The South Union Shaker Village seems to be coming out of its visitation slump, a decade-long period during which numbers have continually dropped each year. 2014, however, is showing a moderate increase in daily guests. One trend we see is that there are more people who visit our historic site for “shopping only” and by-passing the tour of exhibits and Shaker buildings. That trend has led to a significant rise in gift shop sales, which greatly helps to pay for our operational costs. Obviously, we hope that sales will continue to increase, but that we can create new ways to entice or even initiate the public’s interest in history.

I want to invite you to visit South Union on October 11th for Shaker Farm Day. We have a great line-up of traditional farming activities planned and lunch will be provided by the Brickyard restaurant. As usual, this event is a great hands-on opportunity children and an appealing way to gently nudge adult guests into an interest in history.

Many thanks to our interns from this past semester! Katheryn Young, a Western Kentucky University graduate student, worked in our library for 180 hours and in the process scanned the manuscript and printed material collection, wrapped the library’s collection of rare books in acid free paper, accessioned recently acquired manuscripts and printed material, and indexed the periodical collection. Sally Givens, a student from Tennessee Tech, spent much of her time looking for accession numbers as she inventoried the furniture on exhibit in our twenty-three period rooms. She also accessioned and documented un-numbered pieces, and is continuing to work on a book of text and images for people unable to access the upper floors of the Centre House. Both of these young women were material culture “rock stars” and we are most fortunate that they shared their gifts with us.

Progress in the Smoke & Milk House

At left, Johnny Miller sets early 19th century Shaker-made bricks in a bed of sand to complete the floor of the 1835 Smoke House. Approximately 1550 bricks were used to re-create the original dry-laid floor that was removed around 1931. Minor plaster restoration and paint will complete the project.

Three lower level windows, all exposed to the north, are also being restored. Much of the wood that has deteriorated was from 1990s restoration projects now failing. A majority of the craftsmanship from the 1830s needs no work at all. Window frames and sashes were carefully extracted, restored and replaced. (above and left).
SHAKER FARM DAY  
Saturday, October 11  
The common farm chores of yesterday are practically lost arts today, but not at the South Union Shaker Village! Enjoy a day of interactive demonstrations where butter is made, corn is shelled, hams are smoked, laundry is boiled, and more. Lunch will be available by Brickyard restaurant, but not included in ticket price.  
Tickets: $10 per person, $5 children ages 6-12  
Time: 10:00am - 4:00pm

A SHAKER BREAKFAST  
Saturday, November 1  
A Civil War-era Shaker breakfast that promises to please and to astonish ... featuring fried chicken, scrambled eggs, sweet potatoes, pork sausage, asparagus, apple pie, buttermilk biscuits and more! Served at South Union’s famous railroad hotel, the Shaker Tavern.  
Reservations: $22 members, $25 non-members  
Times: Seatings at 8:30am and 10:30am

“SHAKE & STIR” GALA FUNDRAISER  
Thursday, November 20  
An elegant evening of cocktails, dinner and dancing to support the preservation of the South Union Shaker Village. The event will be held at La Gala, 601 State St., in Bowling Green.  
Reservations: $75 per person  
Time: 7:00pm

HOLIDAY CHILDREN’S TOURS  
November 3rd through 21st  
Learn what it was like to prepare for this most American of holidays one hundred years ago. “To Grandmother’s House We Go: Thanksgiving in 1914” is a multi-disciplinary program. Call for group reservations.

“CHRISTMAS AT SHAKERTOWN” HOLIDAY MARKET  
Saturday, December 6  
One of Kentucky’s finest antique and artisan markets, just in time for Christmas! Features over 30 regional antique vendors and artists, all nestled in an historic atmosphere.  
Admission: A canned food item or donation that will be distributed to those needful  
Time: 9:00am - 4:00pm  
For a “first chance” opportunity to shop, make reservations for the Preview Party, Friday evening, December 5. Enjoy coffee, cider and desserts in the most festive of holiday atmospheres.  
Reservations suggested: $10 per person  
Time: 6:00pm - 9:00pm