

Shaker Seminar 2007

South Union and Pleasant Hill, Kentucky

by Christian Goodwillie

The 33rd annual Shaker Seminar took participants to the museums at South Union and Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. These two sites are always a favorite destination for Seminar participants. The friendly people, natural scenery, wonderful Shaker buildings, and outstanding cuisine all add up to an experience unique to Kentucky.

The Seminar convened at South Union on July 25, 2007, which marked the 200th anniversary of the beginning of the Shaker community at South Union. Participants arrived at the 1869 Tavern constructed by the Shakers for passengers on the Louisville-Nashville railroad. Innkeeper JoAnn Moody prepared an outstanding dinner, setting a standard she repeatedly met while the Seminar was in town. Later in the evening at the 1824 Centre House, South Union's director Tommy Hines welcomed participants with a fascinating presentation tracing the history of the site from pre-Shaker days right up to the present. The meeting room of the Centre House had a special feeling that night. Of particular interest in Hines's talk were the new acquisitions to the collection at South Union. The meeting room was enhanced by a beautiful exhibition of new works by Sister Karlyn Cauley, inspired by some of the wildest of the Shaker gift drawings.

The second day began with lecture and guided tour of the original camp meeting grounds at the site of the Gasper River Meeting House, given by Matt Cook. Seminar participants braved Kentucky sinkholes and a bit of heat to hear about John Rankin's spiritual journey and eventual conversion to Shakerism. Back at the Centre House we heard a very interesting talk by Carol Medlicott on the West Union Shakers, particularly Issachar Bates, and their liberty to travel—or lack thereof. After a delicious lunch catered by Roy's BBQ of nearby Russellville we reconvened at the Centre House. Tommy Hines and Matt Cook took the stage together to present recent archaeological and restoration work done on the Smoke and Milk House and 1875 Grain Barn at South Union. Seminar participants were then invited to walk out and see both buildings. Hamilton College Librarian Randy Ericson was up next to announce the newly formed collaboration between Hancock Shaker Village and Hamilton College

in sponsoring future Shaker Seminars. Ericson explained that Hamilton College Library's *American Communal Societies Quarterly* will, beginning with the October 2007 issue, publish articles based on presentations at the Shaker Seminars. Randy then proceeded to take us on a splendid guided tour of the College's considerable collections in the area of communal societies. Christian Goodwillie wrapped up the day with a talk that focused on South Union Shaker Harvey L. Eads's 1835 visit to the northeastern Shaker villages. Seminar participants Carol Medlicott and Lois Madden joined Goodwillie in singing some of the songs Eads collected on that journey. These songs were transcribed from a manuscript hymnal now in the collection at South Union. Everyone then repaired to the 1869 Tavern for a bit of relaxation before a final excellent meal prepared by Moody and her staff.

Day three of the Seminar started with a two and a half hour drive from South Union to Pleasant Hill. As the beautiful rock fences and rolling hills of the bluegrass country came into view, Seminar participants knew Pleasant Hill wasn't far away. The elegant Trustee's Office at Pleasant Hill was the perfect setting for lunch as hungry folks arrived. That afternoon we met at the West Lot, a remote outpost of the community, now converted to a dedicated meeting space for conferences. The brick dwelling at the West Lot was the setting for an excellent talk by Education Director Susan Lyons Hughes on the Pleasant Hill Shakers and the Civil War. About this time a strong thunderstorm rolled through, knocking out power to the West Lot. This spooky opportunity was perfect for an impromptu discussion of Shaker ghost lore, of which there is quite a bit relating to the West Lot. After the storm subsided we all made our way to the Trustee's Office for an excellent and plentiful dinner. Following dinner, M. Stephen Miller and Christian Goodwillie delivered a presentation put together by Pleasant Hill's Vice President and Museum Director Larrie Curry. Curry was unable to deliver the talk herself due to the power failure earlier in the afternoon. This copiously illustrated assemblage of ephemera and imprints in the collection at Pleasant Hill was well-received. Following this, Rich Spence from the Friends of White Water Shaker Village showed an incredible short film that presents a digitally-reconstructed view of White Water.

Saturday began with a serious southern breakfast. Diane Sasson was the first speaker up that day, presenting new research on the interaction of Laura Holloway-Langford with the Shakers at Mount Lebanon. Pat

Goitein followed with a fascinating look at former Shakers who had left Pleasant Hill and established themselves at Peoria, Illinois. Christian Goodwillie rounded out the morning with an examination of the conflict between frontiersman James Smith and Shaker leader Richard McNemar. A buffet lunch was served at the West Lot. John Norton picked things up in the afternoon with a talk about relations between the Swedes at Bishop Hill, Illinois, and the Shakers at Pleasant Hill. It was particularly fitting that many of the Swedish converts to Shakerism had lived at the West Lot where we were meeting. Paul Pearson from Bellarmine University finished the program with an excellent lecture on Thomas Merton's attraction to the Shakers. This lecture featured photographs that Merton had taken at Pleasant Hill before the restoration got underway.

The rest of Saturday was spent in relaxation aboard the Dixie Belle cruising down the Kentucky River. After a hearty dinner, Seminar participants reconvened at the West Lot to hear two impromptu talks from George and Darlene Kohrman. George presented his outstanding collection of Shaker stereoviews, and Darlene gave a humorous and fascinating talk about collecting miniature Shaker furniture. The program ended in high spirits.

Sunday morning, after breakfast, participants began to get ready to depart. The Western Shaker Study Group had organized a talk by M. Stephen Miller on the process of writing and publishing his new book *From Shaker Lands and Shaker Hands*. Many of the Seminar participants stayed on to hear this informal and very interesting presentation.

It is with sadness that we note the passing of one of the true regulars at the Shaker Seminar throughout the years. Rosemary Lawson passed away within a couple of weeks of the end of the Shaker Seminar. A lifelong researcher on the Ohio Shakers, Rosemary was always ready to share new discoveries she'd made. She will be missed greatly.

Next year's Shaker Seminar is tentatively scheduled to be at Hamilton College, Groveland, and Sodus Bay, New York, from July 23rd through the 27th. Watch www.hancockshakervillage.org for more details as they are firmed up. We hope to see you there!