

News and Notes

By Walter A. Brumm

News is important to people less for the information it conveys than for the connections it makes. It removes isolation and permits avenues of social involvement. From the world scene to the communal one, this holds true. For those interested in the Shakers during the mid-twentieth century, connections with museum programs, commercial ventures and research came by way of *The World of Shaker*, *The Shaker Quarterly*, and *The Shaker Messenger*. The first and last of these publications were like “world news” in mass media, providing a broad perspective on Shaker-related activities rather than focusing on one Shaker site or one museum. This inclusiveness led to greater opportunities for connection between interested persons in diverse locations and between those with general and niche interests.

The same “world news” approach for other communal groups has been far less available. In addition to community newsletters such as *The Harmonist* (Old Economy Village) and the *Chronicon* (Ephrata Cloister) which are specific in their focus, there is the Communal Studies Association newsletter *Communiqué* which is a good source for news about many different groups. It does not, however, provide the depth or breadth of coverage to be found in the aforementioned (and now discontinued) Shaker-related publications. This new quarterly from the Hamilton College Library is an attempt to fill this void. It has the potential to connect persons and groups with common interests in an effort to keep past communitarian efforts alive and to encourage cross-disciplinary research into the structures and processes that promote or harm communal survival.

If the first bit of news is Hamilton College’s effort to showcase one of its special collections and to serve as a “connector” for researchers interested in all aspects of communitarian endeavors, the second is the reporting of events and activities which promote learning about the contributions of these communities to society at large. Serving as correspondent for several recent gatherings dealing with matters Shaker and Harmonist, I submit the following report.

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On July 29, 2006 Old Economy Village opened a museum exhibit entitled “Tracks, Trestles, and Trustees: Railroads and the Harmony Society,” which will run through December 30, 2007. The theme of the exhibit as stated in the brochure is that of separating “the aspirations of the

Harmony Society from those of other communal societies in 19th century America. Though often imagines [sic] to be like the Shakers – retiring from the world and supporting themselves with handcraft industries – the Harmony Society took a bolder view of the world.” Now there is a challenge for students of Shaker history! I acknowledge, however, that there is a large element of truth in the statement. The Harmonists did make many more commercial investments in non-Society endeavors. They had significant investment in mining, oil, timber and railroads in the second half of the 19th century. To what extent these actions were taken to cope with and compensate for the loss of members, particularly able bodied laborers, and an aging population can never be known, but the facts suggest that interpretation. More to the point of the exhibit, permit me to quote again from the brochure: “The Society would evolve from simple self-sufficient communalism to expansive capitalism as their outside investments grew ..., culminating in the 1870’s purchase of Stock in The Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Rail Road (P&LERR). Jacob Henrici, the Society’s leader, would further emulate the 19th century capitalist ideal when he became president of the P&LERR, and competed directly with men like Cornelius Vanderbilt ... for control of the P&LERR.”

Along with the exhibit, a number of educational programs related to the railroad theme are being presented during the fall of 2006. For information, contact the Old Economy Village Visitors Center, 724-266-4500.

On September 30, 2006, Old Economy Village will host Erntefest from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. This yearly festival celebrates the fall harvest and shows how rural people prepared for winter. The Village learned about the original celebration by way of Charles Nordhoff, author of *Communitistic Societies of the United States*, who visited Economy in 1874. Nordhoff described the Harvest-Home celebration which took place in the autumn: “On festival occasions, the Harmonists assembled in the Great Hall and there, after singing and addresses, a feast was served. An elaborate kitchen adjacent to the Hall was used for the purpose of preparing these feasts, while in the two great cellars nearby there were fine large wine-casks which would make a Californian envious, so well built are they.” Those who attend the present-day festivities can help prepare cheese, sausage and ginger beer, as well as make apple schnitz and cider. After working and touring the buildings, visitors can partake of some German food, topping it all off with a piece of Concord grape pie.



Photograph from the 1880's showing a Henrici & Lenz railroad car. The two girls in the car are Ruth Henrici and Margaret Rye.

(Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Old Economy Village. Photograph no. 688. Photo cropped and digitally enhanced by Marianita Amodio. Used with permission.)

I am also pleased to report on two recent Shaker field trips. These were unusual, given that they were to sites which have no remaining Shaker buildings or artifacts. Unlike most Shaker events which focus on visuals, these two sessions depended upon the mind's eye, but that made them no less worthwhile. For me, getting a sense of place – the lay of the land – is part of interpreting events in Shaker history. What made both excursions successful were guides who had extensive knowledge of Shaker records and who had done on-site research to locate where buildings had stood. Participants walking the sites were provided with copies of old Shaker site maps, while the guides described what would have been seen in the past. In the process, the sites came alive.

On August 4, 2006, I joined the Western Shaker Study Group at the site of Ohio's Watervliet Shaker Community. After its closing in 1900, ownership of the site did not transfer immediately to the State of Ohio. However, once the 640 acres of Watervliet in Montgomery County became State property, it was known as the Dayton State Hospital Farm, providing food for the mental hospital. When that operation ceased, the State of Ohio in July, 1981 gave the property to the Miami Valley Research Foundation, a consortium of area colleges. The Foundation then developed the land as the Miami Valley Research Park, eliminating what remained of the Shaker heritage. The last building on the site, the Center Family dwelling, was razed in 1984 and the foundation filled in and covered over. However, prior to this, two other existing buildings were moved to the Kettering-Moraine Museum grounds – one a small frame house, the other a barn.

The experts on the Watervliet community are Martha Boice (president of the Western Shaker Study Group), Rose Mary Lawson, and Bill Mooney. Mooney, with his avid interest in Shaker mills, was the site tour leader. The 75 to 80 of us on the tour began our re-imagining on the banks of Beaver Creek, in sight of the junction of Patterson and County Line Roads. There Mooney pointed to where the tanning house and carding mill had been located. He also explained how the course of the creek was altered by the Shakers in order to accommodate their needs. Mill products were significant to the economy of the village. Although the Shakers sold fruits and vegetables at the downtown market house in Dayton, until the late 1880's they also had a thriving business in stocking yarn which they peddled in southwest Ohio.

As we progressed up the hill from the creek, Mooney pointed out

remains of the original macadam road bed that had passed through the village, which was the route taken by the Shakers to Dayton. Nearing the top of the rise, he noted where Richard McNemar's printing shop was located. Bearing left from the print shop we soon arrived at the Center family dwelling, which was situated on our right. Opposite it, on the other side of Shaker Lane (running perpendicular to Patterson Road), stood the Shaker meeting house.

The location of the old dwelling had special meaning to me, since I had visited the site with Ray Pearson in the late 1960's. Then a vacant structure, it was in a deteriorating condition. However, what struck me about the building at the time was its flat roof, which did not look Shaker. Thanks to Rose Mary Lawson I learned that the building originally had the roof line and T-shaped design of many Shaker buildings, similar to the Center family dwelling at South Union, Kentucky. When the State of Ohio purchased the land, the building had two stories and a large attic area. During the years the property was used as a farm, this dwelling housed patients referred to as "trusties," meaning that they needed little supervision and could help with the farm work. Unfortunately, one of the trusties purportedly set fire to the upper portion of the building. When it was renovated by the State, concrete floors and a flat roof replaced the original hip roof and wood floors.

At various stops along the tour route, the Western Shaker Singers sang songs written at Watervliet – "Babylon Is Fallen," "Hill of God's Abode," "Covenant Hymn," "Go Thy Way And Sin No More," "Awake, Arise, O Zion," and "Come Ye, Little Lovely Band." The first and last require further comment. "Babylon" has been sung outside the Shaker societies by becoming part of the larger shape note tradition. Words to the hymn can be found in *Millennial Praises*. The last song, "Come Ye," is a welcome song. In the 1840's it was used to welcome a group of Whitewater Shakers who were coming to live at Watervliet. Although the original words are known, the tune used when sung by the Shakers is not known. However, there was a Watervliet Christmas hymn whose tune fit the welcome song. What we heard on our tour that evening was a blended composition.

Following Mooney's excellent presentation, the group left the research park and reassembled for a business meeting at Mt. St. John Bergamo, a Roman Catholic facility which includes a parish and a retreat center. The Marianists bought this property in 1910. It occupies 160 acres which were previously the East farm of the Watervliet Shaker Settlement. This

portion of the Shaker property extended from Montgomery County across County Line Road into Green County.

The walking tour of Watervliet was also the kickoff event for the formation of a new group – Friends of Watervliet, Ohio, Shaker Village. This group has two important objectives. First, they want to educate people in the Dayton area about their Shaker heritage. As Leon Bey noted, of all the northern Shaker groups, Watervliet alone remains without a support group. The second reason is equally important. Since Melba Hunt, the force behind the Kettering-Moraine Museum and its Shaker collection, became incapacitated by Alzheimers disease, the museum closed and remains in a state of legal limbo. Hunt collected pieces of Watervliet Shaker furniture and a number of artifacts from the site. She secured two Shaker buildings from Watervliet (mentioned above), and rallied volunteers to raise funds to move the buildings to the museum grounds. Although the museum and the property are owned by the cities of Kettering and Moraine, there is a question about who has title to the contents of the collection, including the two buildings. The Friends group is dedicated to following the legal situation closely in order to be sure the Shaker artifacts are taken care of. At present, there are serious questions about conditions in the museum and the state of these artifacts. For those interested in joining the Friends group or in learning more about their efforts on education and preservation, contact Leon Bey by telephone at 937-274-4749 or by email at grantsguru501c3@yahoo.com.

To promote the Friends educational objective, Bey has assembled a “Watervliet Shaker Exhibit” in the Local History Room of the Dayton Metro Library. Although a small exhibit, it highlights the Watervliet archival resources available at the library. Unique to this exhibit is the special attention given to Bertha Karg Furey’s childhood summers at Watervliet. Martha Evans had been a Shaker sister for twenty-two years before leaving the society and marrying Henry Karg, a hired hand who worked at the Village. She was forty years of age in 1880, according to the U. S. Federal Census. Her decision to leave the Shakers and to marry was in response to her assessment that the Society was in decline, as well as to her emotional attachment to the hired man.

Following their marriage, Martha and Henry Karg adopted Bertha. Although Martha was no longer a Shaker, the community did not shun her or reject her continuing friendship. That lasting bond explains how Bertha Karg came to spend her summers at Watervliet. The story of

her recollections is recounted in Melba Hunt's book *Summers at Watervliet*, important for its record of the last years of Shaker life at Watervliet. In the exhibit there are pictures of Bertha and the Kargs.

The programs of the Western Shaker Study Group this year are in recognition of the bicentennial of the Shakers at Watervliet, Ohio. "On April 26, 1806, it was recorded that all met together and went forth to worship in dance." Thus began the 94-year history of the Watervliet Society. According to Mooney the relationship between Union Village and Watervliet was in several significant ways a troubled one. Union Village exercised authority over all the western communities, but its proximity to Watervliet gave them special influence over that community. After James Patterson died in 1822, the leadership choices made by Union Village on behalf of Watervliet were neither strong nor consistent. In the end, these choices and other policy considerations made Watervliet's existence problematic. Mooney's assessment of a troubled relationship between Union Village and Watervliet is intriguing – the perfect topic for a history or sociology graduate thesis.

The next meeting of the Western Shaker Study Group is scheduled for October 6, 2006. Its focus will be "The Roots of the Watervliet Shaker Village and the Beulah Church." The latter is where Richard McNemar served as an itinerant minister, one of several churches he ministered to in the area. His principal church at the time, however, was the Turtle Creek Church, where he was pastor before joining the Shakers in 1805. A tour of the cemetery adjoining the church now located on the site will be part of the program on October 6 and will be led by Joyce Grabill. Both parts of the program will illustrate the connection of the Shakers with the early New Light Presbyterians in the Miami Valley.

It is also worth noting that Lawson and Mooney are the primary authors of a work in preparation tentatively titled *Western Watervliet*.

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My second field trip took me to West Union, Indiana. I toured the site with a group of twelve other Shaker enthusiasts on August 25, 2006. Using Richard McNemar's 1824 map and having the insights of the leading lights of West Union, or Busro, history, namely Dorothy Jones (the prime mover in organizing this field trip), John Martin Smith and Carol Medlicott, we attempted to locate the village and imagine how it appeared in the years of Shaker occupancy. This effort was made easier by the earlier archaeological work of Don Janzen. Smith, for years the

leading researcher on West Union, identified on a map how West Union was composed of one large and two smaller parcels of land on either side of the larger one, the latter two being at a distance of three to four miles from the larger section. He also brought a copy of an old newspaper photograph of a large house. What was such a large dwelling doing in such a small, if not insignificant, village? Perhaps because of its relatively short life, many people forget that West Union was once home to over two hundred (and some would suggest closer to four hundred) Shakers. The meeting house was also large and patterned after the one at New Lebanon, with a ceiling that could be raised and lowered, although the meaning of that was debated by those assembled.

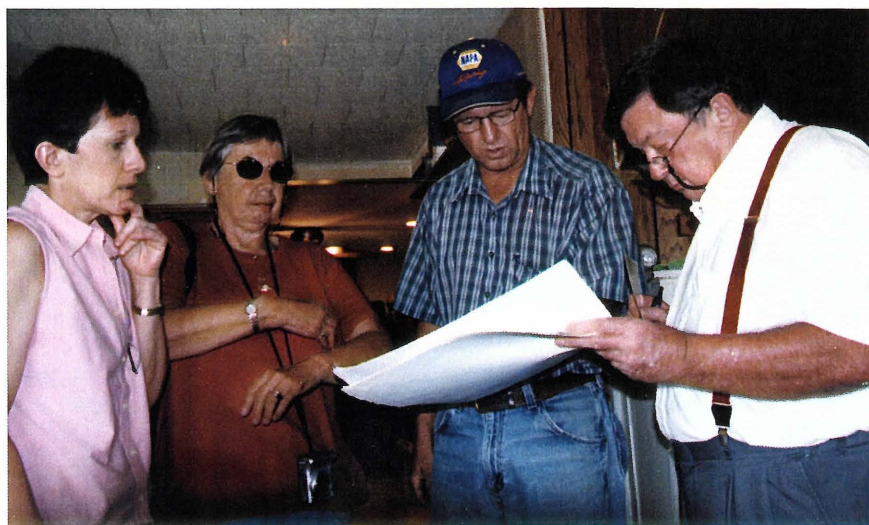
Both the dwelling and meeting house endured until sometime between 1882 and 1890. Given how long they survived after the Shakers' departure from Indiana, it remains a mystery why no other photographs of the buildings have come to light, although the search for such photos is ongoing.

Our group was fortunate to meet with the present owners, Jerry and Susan Cardinal, who have a grain and melon operation. The group which assembled at the Cardinal home at Oaktown, Indiana was delighted when Jerry Cardinal showed us his land title document. When the property was purchased by his family, a title search was prepared which described Shaker land transactions dating from 1807 to 1829, the year that Nathan Sharp transferred the land to Henry Sprinkle. The land was then transferred from the Sprinkle heirs to William Cardinal, Jerry's grandfather, in 1941. When Cardinal offered to copy items of interest to our group, his offer was readily accepted.

In the evening, attendees gathered in Vincennes, Indiana to hear comments from Smith about his ongoing research and to hear a paper by Carol Medlicott, an emerging scholar on West Union. Her paper, "Conflict and Tribulation on the Frontier: West Union Shakers," was presented earlier at the Hancock Shaker Seminar this summer. Medlicott is particularly interested in the role of Issachar Bates in the settlement and leadership of Busro. Furthermore, she has a strong interest in the nature and character of the social relationships between the Shakers and their local neighbors. With her interest in music, Medlicott is exploring the relationship of West Union music to that of other local religious groups. On the subject of intergroup relations, I noted in this forum my own interest in the relationship that developed between the Shakers and the

Harmony Society, which was then located in Posey County to the south of Busro. Also at this evening gathering was a surprise contribution made by Smith. Among his items for “show and tell” was the original parchment land grant for the Shakers in Indiana.

Before we disbanded on Saturday morning, a small caravan drove out to the Shaker mill site on the Embarrass River. This site in Illinois was acquired by the Shakers in 1817. From the bridge over the river, nothing of the mill could be seen, although its approximate location was indicated by Smith. Here again, what an opportunity for some university archaeology class dig! For a clearer sense of this site’s relation to West Union, see *Maps of the Shaker West*.



Carol Medlicott, Dorothy Jones, Jerry Cardinal, and John Martin Smith (left to right) peruse documents related to the West Union Shakers.
(*Photograph by Walter Brumm.*)