

THE FORUM

Oral History
Magen Edvalson
accepts new
post. **Page 2**



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Sites Shuttered; Hope Persists



In Pandemic, Leaders Find Much to Give

By Greg Clark

The stream of interns, crowded bus tours, and throngs of visitors may have stopped because of the pandemic, but the work at properties supported by the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation continues.

To be sure, when word came in frigid February that the sites would be shut down through December 31, a lot of people—workers and tourists alike—were disappointed.

But the quiet time has resulted in numerous blessings. They've come in the form of opportunities to catch up on maintenance as well as development of a burgeoning online following for various projects.

Over it all hangs an air of uncertainty—and hope.

"Although we are saddened by the site closures and canceled tour, foundation Executive Director Barbara Walden said, "not even a global pandemic will stop us from sharing church heritage."

See Closure on page 8

Brrr!

Frosty winter days covered historic sites such as the Mansion House in Nauvoo, Illinois, and Heritage Plaza in Independence, Missouri.



Historic Sites Mourn Loss of Tom Morain

By Greg Clark

One-dimensional? Not Tom Morain.

Tom, who died at 73 in October, left a multi-faceted legacy, including

time spent as a board member of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, which is dedicated to preserving and sharing church history.

See Morain on page 7



Hey Historians: Don't Just Write It; Say It!

By Greg Clark

On this newsletter's front page, near the upper-left corner, you'll find the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation logo with its motto: *Preserving and Sharing Church Heritage*.

When it comes to fulfilling that goal, people first may think of properties, such as the Kirtland Temple in Ohio; Liberty Hall in Lamoni, Iowa; or the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois.

But there are other ways to preserve and share church heritage. Enter Magen Edvalson, the new oral-history coordinator. Besides seeing brick and mortar maintained, she wants to make sure that memories, insights, and perspectives are never forgotten.

"Oral history is something we don't think of that often," said Magen, who accepted the post in August. "Consider the adage that 'history is written by the winners.' What they write becomes the authority.

"Oral histories balance that out because they seek out the experience of people who lived the events and who might otherwise not be thought of. We can look at the primary sources in things like women's ordination or gay marriage. But we don't always get the people involved in that."

Apostle Lachlan

Mackay, director of historic properties for the church, said that among Magen's responsibilities will be developing training videos for use on social media such as YouTube.

He pointed out that the position seems especially pertinent in light of the pandemic.

"The role of the foundation in the life of the church has been elevated this last year in ways beyond what we ever thought possible: seminary, lecture series, campgrounds."

The oral-history project is another example.

Magen, who lives in Ogden, Utah, holds a key perspective. She was raised in the LDS church and joined Community of Christ in 2017.

"An oral history is a collection, or recording...of somebody's history as given through oral means," Magen said. "In the broad sense, it would be fantastic to collect the histories of everyone associated with the church."

For now, she said, "Lach has a list of people of interest

compiled over several years by church historians and the First Presidency. As they retire, we'd like to collect those and put them in the church archives.

"It would be fantastic to interview people who grew up in the church, who were impacted by specific events in church history, or their experiences in other parts of the world."

When that happens, church history becomes more than a series of documents and dates; it becomes personal. "It just helps show how sincere the church is in this mission," Magen said.

As a global church, the project sometimes can become complicated.

"Several countries have several laws that have to be abided by (in doing the

recordings)," Magen said, adding, "We need the impressions of the interviewer as well as the person being interviewed. (The impressions) are just as significant as the history being told them."

In addition, interviewers must be trained in the proper ways to conduct an ethical interview. And, of course, other people are needed to transcribe the oral histories. For more information, please contact Magen at meolsen24@gmail.com.



An internship helped Magen Edvalson (far left) grow in appreciation for the historic sites.

Kirtland Bids Farewell to Innovator

By Greg Clark

Seth Bryant ended his four-year run as site director of the Kirtland Temple in September 2020 by accepting a position with the Veterans Administration.

In those four years he bolstered the site with numerous projects, earned multiple testimonies of gratitude and well wishes from members of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, and helped tell the story of Restoration history.

His passion endeared him to supporters of the church's historic sites, co-workers, and history lovers.

"We will greatly miss Seth's presence at the Kirtland Temple, but are grateful for his dedication and the many sacrifices he made during his time in Kirtland," said Barbara Walden, executive director of the foundation. "To say that we were very blessed to have him representing the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation is an understatement."

Seth worked hard on numerous projects. Among them:

- Installing exterior lights to illuminate the Kirtland Temple.
- Updating museum exhibits.
- Overseeing interior improvements such as painting.

But among his most noteworthy efforts were projects that helped link the Temple's place in early church history with today's online culture.

He designed a new website for the Temple, launched an online museum store, boosted online guided tours, and worked tirelessly to begin a virtual reality tour.

He also helped train volunteers and summer interns, managed the Visitor Center, and served on the foundation board.

In those four years, he became a powerful ambassador for the foundation and its work of preserving and sharing church heritage. As such he joined the online Summer Lecture Series, participated at several Storyteller sessions, served as a guest lecturer for the Community of Christ Seminary, and became a favorite at numerous reunions.



As news of Seth's resignation spread via email, several board members echoed Walden's expressions of gratitude.

Jacque Bethel: "This is such sad news! His enthusiasm and vast knowledge in so many arenas has been such a blessing to the Site and [foundation]! He will be greatly missed!"

Tim Klocko: "Sorry to hear this. Seth, I wish you the best in all your future endeavors."

Donna Steele-Wendling: His knowledge [and] passion will be missed. I'm hoping he will continue to share both of those assets to the community [and] us. Wishing Seth the best in this new adventure."

Karen Graham Wade: "Seth has been, and I am certain will continue to be, a moving force within the church history community. My main hope at the moment is that the momentum he has generated at the site will continue..."

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Some give to honor and preserve church heritage.

Some give because of spiritual experiences while visiting one of the sites.

Some give to provide opportunities for young people to learn and deepen their appreciation for church history.

Some give in honor or memory of loved ones, past and present.

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Morain

Continued from Page 1

History was not the only passion in Tom's life—family, music, church, bridge, and more were others—but it did play a prominent role. Among his accomplishments, Tom:

- Earned a doctorate in American Studies from the University of Iowa.
- Wrote and edited several books on Iowa history.
- Served as director of research and interpretation at Living History Farms in Urbandale, Iowa, from 1981 to 1995.
- Led the State Historical Society of Iowa for several years.

But his work with the Historic Sites Foundation held a special place in his heart.

He served on the board from 2012–2014. After leaving the board, he continued his support by leading history classes, hymn festivals, and worship services. He also wrote grants for Liberty Hall in Lamoni, Iowa, and spoke to potential donors.

Barbara Walden, executive director of the foundation, remembers how he blended his passions for music and history.

"One of his more memorable projects was recording a music CD for the Historic Sites Foundation that featured his talents as a pianist and creative artist," she wrote. "The CD was so popular, we had to go back to Graceland to develop more CDs at least three separate times."

In addition, Tom contributed to reunions and Storyteller events in at least five states.

"You could even catch him occasionally leading a tour and/or school group at Liberty Hall," Barbara said of the site in Lamoni, Iowa. "Tom has served many roles over the years, but dedicated husband, father, and friend were by far the most important to him."

The foundation was a good fit. When Tom joined the board, he reminisced about his first experience with a church historic site. "I went to Nauvoo (the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Illinois) during my Graceland years and was fascinated. A college friend was a Nauvoo guide, so we got not only the standard tour, but a behind-the-scenes look as well."

He also commented on why he served on the foundation board: "With a professional background in museums and historical organizations, I find that [board] is a way I can combine my training and devotion to the church while I work with committed and talented people."

Walden's respect and admiration shone through in a written tribute:

"It is difficult to put into words the significant impact Tom Morain had on those who were fortunate enough to cross paths with him. His passion for history and enthusiastic way of sharing a good story was contagious. His musical talents lifted your spirit and made you want to dance. His witty sense of humor and quick comebacks made your sides hurt and cheeks sore from uncontrollable laughter.

"...It is my prayer that Tom's love for family and passion for preserving the past will live on in the hundreds of lives he touched. May those of us who had the good fortune to serve alongside him do our best to continue his work in preserving and sharing church heritage long into the future."

Make a Donation, Aid Preservation

Preserving and sharing church heritage and telling the sacred story of our journey is a privilege and a responsibility.

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Volunteers Needed

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Closure

Continued from page 1

Behind Walden's creative efforts, a raft of new options have helped fill the void since the pandemic began and sites were closed in March 2020. Offerings in 2020 included the We Are All Storytellers project, Tuesday Tales, Throwback Thursdays, Sunday-night devotions, the Summer Lecture Series, and special events such as the online Emma Hymn Festival in late July.

"It was exciting to see how well attended they were," Walden said of the online events. "Now people can continue their passion for church history from the safety of their own home."

So she's promised more.

She's already planning two more lecture series. One this spring will involve biographies of church figures in the 20th century. In the autumn, another lecture series will zero in on church history without boundaries, focusing on activities outside North America.

"We see (such activities) as continuing into the long term," Walden said.

While she has directed many efforts in cyberspace, Apostle Lachlan Mackay also has helped move along projects on the grounds of historic sites—even during 2020's stormy summer and 2021's frigid winter.

At a fall board meeting Mackay, the church's director of historic sites, talked of landscaping, LED lighting projects, new fencing, roof work, and much more.

Also, you can find numerous photos by Christin Mackay, director of the Joseph Smith Historic Site, on Facebook. They



Chores during the pandemic included removing trees damaged by a storm in Nauvoo.

continue to reflect the beauty that will await future guests.

Meanwhile, if you just can't stay home any longer, you're still welcome to hop in the car. Though you can't enter the buildings, you still can cruise by the Red Brick Store at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois; Liberty Hall in Lamoni, Iowa; the Kirtland Temple in Ohio; the Stone Church in Plano, Illinois; and Heritage Plaza in Independence, Missouri.

After the pandemic, you'll be welcome to return for a more intimate tour.