

# THE FORUM



Joseph Smith Historic Site staff in period dress.

Community of Christ  
Historic Sites Foundation



## Preserving & Sharing Church Heritage

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

To give to the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, call (217) 453-2246.

Another alternative is to send donations to P.O. Box 338, Nauvoo, IL 62354.

You also can give by visiting the online site at [www.historicsitesfoundation.org](http://www.historicsitesfoundation.org).

The Web site also features frequent updates on news from the historic sites.

## Walden Takes Key Post

By Greg Clark

When people think of history, they often think “old.”

But the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation’s new executive director wears a face of youth: fresh-scrubbed, energetic, and full

of exuberance.

Barb Walden, 32, agreed in principle to a contract at November’s board meeting in Plano, Illinois, with final details to be worked out. She immediately started her

new position.

“Barb will be busy,” Board President Jeff Naylor said. “And once the final job description is approved, Barb will be well on her way on many

See Walden on Page 8

## Tom Morain Fills Vacancy on Board

By Greg Clark

Tom Morain never had a choice.

When you grow up in a house that has a basement filled with newspapers dating back more than a century, you really can’t help but become intrigued by history.

All those marvelous tidbits about life in Jefferson, Iowa, were just too hard to resist.

So Tom, now 62, found his path in life early. Now that path has led him to a recently accepted position on the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation’s Board of Directors. He joins a group that supports historic properties in Nauvoo, Illinois; Kirtland, Ohio; Independence, Missouri; and more.

“Tom has an extensive background in museum and

See Morain on Page 3

## New Kirtland Leader



Ron Romig recently returned to his childhood roots this fall by accepting a position at the Kirtland Temple. See story on Page 4

# From Liberty Hall to Russian with Love

## Intern Learns Stereotypes Can Be Wrong

By Greg Clark

**T**amara Polyanskaya wasn't happy.

The college student came from Vladivostok, Russia, a metropolitan seaport of about a million people. Suddenly, she found herself in Lamoni, Iowa, a Midwestern community of fewer than 2,500 residents. This was not what she expected when she agreed to join a U.S. State Department exchange program.

"At first, when I came to the U.S., I was upset because it was a small city," she said. "But now I think it was the best way. I hope I stay connected with them for many years."

Liberty Hall, supported by the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, played a large role in her change of attitude. A helping of old-fashioned Midwest hospitality and



*Tamara Polyanskaya (left) enjoyed her time at Liberty Hall with Martha Harper McKain and grew to love the atmosphere in Lamoni, Iowa.*

acceptance from the Graceland University community didn't hurt, either.

Polyanskaya, 21, majors in history in Vladivostok, but she studied anthropology last school year while at Graceland. Liberty Hall, the site for an internship required by the exchange program, was a perfect match.

Its Victorian architec-

ture, with ten bedrooms and strong links to Joseph Smith III and Restoration history, proved an irresistible lure.

"You can help and do the work," she said. "You feel very happy and find satisfaction in helping people. And it gives you a lot of confidence. Keeping history alive is one of the most important things in our world."

Her passion for history quickly made itself apparent to Alma Blair, a foundation board member who volunteers at Liberty Hall.

"She immediately recognized the house as being Victorian," Blair said. "She wanted to work here and learn more of how we do things in America and other aspects of historic sites."

Blair said Polyanskaya helped with antique clothing, doing research, work-

ing with the computer, and checking many artifacts.

She also was willing to dirty her hands on less-exciting tasks, such as cleaning and caring for plants. And then there was this old kitchen pan...

"She spent three hours one day cleaning the rust off one of the pots," Blair said. "Steel wool had to be used."

Blair appreciated the work, but he said her talents lend themselves to more-cerebral tasks. She acknowledged that "I like to do research and work with photographs."

She paid the museum the ultimate compliment when she told one official: "When you're outside, it's one world; but when you're in here, it's another world."

*See Russian on Page 3*



*Tamara Polyanska learned a lot from Alma Blair.*



# Morain

*Continued from Page 1*

historical-society activities, especially in the state of Iowa," said Jeff Naylor, the foundation's board president. "His professional background and love of history will greatly benefit CCHSF."

He brings a resume laden with experience, awards, and qualifications.

Among them, he owns a doctorate in American civilization from the University of Iowa, five years spent teaching history at Iowa State University, and his current job as director of government relations at Graceland University. He's a past president of the John Whitmer Historical Association, was director of history at Living History Farm near Des Moines, Iowa, and has worked as an interpreter and grant writer in Lamoni, Iowa, at Liberty Hall, one of the sites supported by CCHSF.

And then there's a little matter of the award he recently received, the highest given by the State Historical Society of Iowa. It



*Tom Morain*

honored him for lifetime contribution and continuing service to the understanding of Iowa history.

So, with that kind of portfolio, how did the CCHSF board lure him?

"They asked," Morain said, laughing.

He was an easy sell because of his Community of Christ heritage. He's even taught Temple School classes. But the love of history all started with those old copies of the *Jefferson Bee* and *Jefferson Herald* from the Iowa town where his father had been an editor.

"I'd spread those out on the Ping-Pong table and could look through a hundred years of small-town history," he said. "I was a history major, and between my freshman and sophomore years the *Jefferson Bee* celebrated the

centennial. My job was to write the history content."

Though he has set no goals for his new position, Morain's own history suggests that he will be interested in helping develop a merger between research and display. He explains it this way:

"Quite often people go to a historical site because it can be a place they can be together with their group. They want an experience that is enjoyable, and they aren't that particular about content. The challenge of historic sites is to make it worthwhile in content while you continue to make it an enjoyable experience."

Among those pleased by Morain's acceptance to the board is his western-civilization teacher from Graceland, Alma Blair, himself a current CCHSF board member.

"I would say that Alma and other early John Whitmer leaders were the first ones who taught me that church history could be done with the same rigorous history standards that you use in other disciplines," Morain said. "Up until then, I just assumed

that church history was off limits because you had to take it on faith when it didn't make sense."

As for his part, Blair is pleased to once again be able to work closely with his former pupil.

"He's published a number of things," Blair said. "He is one of the smartest people I've ever known and has a wonderful sense of humor. He has a very firm foundation in church history, and he's one of the best idea men I know of. He also works very well with people."

But don't get the idea that Morain is a one-dimensional academic.

"He plays the piano at church," Blair said, "and when he does he puts a spin on it, a jazzy feel. He made a piano disk, and he can play any kind of music under any style."

He doesn't restrict his music to contemporary tunes. Blair explained: "He'll say, 'This is the way Bach would do it. The way Mozart would do it. The way Haydn would do it.'"

Hmm. Seems Morain finds joy from days gone by in areas besides newspapers and church sites.

# Russian

*Continued from Page 2*

Diana Jones, Graceland's director of International Programs, said the internship helped Polyanskaya to grow.

"She talks constantly about how wonderful it has been, and she really appreciates Alma and Mrs.

Martha McKain (the site coordinator).

"This is the kind of thing she wants to do professionally, so to have this experience to enhance her own life when she goes home is wonderful.

"She has a lot of curiosity and ... a positive attitude. She enjoys people and enjoys learning."

Besides Liberty Hall,

Polyanskaya has embraced the community, taking a role in Lamoni's Intercultural Heritage celebration.

"We started a festival that has a carnival setting," Jones said.

"We were selling Asian food, Russian, and others. She helped cook."

And was it tasty?

"Oh yeah!" said Jones,

who especially liked Polyanskaya's borsch, a kind of Russian soup.

Polyanskaya said her stay enriched her.

"This year was like a lifetime for me," she said. "I had a lot of new friends. The work was very fascinating. I think I received a lot of experience, personal and professional."

# Romig Returns to Kirtland with Anticipation

By Greg Clark

**C**all it a severe case of whiplash.

This summer Ron Romig found himself squarely in the middle of a downsizing effort after spending 21 years as archivist at Community of Christ headquarters in Independence, Missouri.

Less than two months later he stood in his boyhood home of Kirtland, Ohio, preparing to step into a new role at a historic site that he treasures: the Temple and the Visitor and Spiritual Formation Center.

Romig, 60, had lived in Independence since 1981, putting down deep roots and immersing himself in work.

In leaving, he mourned displacement from friends, associations, and colleagues. Then again, Kirtland was the place where as a boy he attended reunions, worshiped in the Temple, and began laying the foundation for his faith and career.

It was home.

"So we come with a sense of grieving, but also great anticipation," Romig said shortly before moving into the position as historic sites specialist Sept. 1.

He replaced Barb Walden, who loved the post and spent seven years telling of Kirtland's role with the Saints. She left when her husband accepted a job with the Kentucky Historical Society.

After pouring herself



*The exterior and interior beauty of the Kirtland Temple have been familiar to Ron Romig since his childhood.*



into the role at the Temple and as a member of the Kirtland community, she felt a special attachment, and she fretted over who

Community of Christ would find to replace her.

"One of my biggest concerns...was that we could hire a director who

might not have that emotional and personal connection to the site to know it's sacred space.

"It's crucial that you have someone in this position who not only understands church history but is passionate about church history and has the ability to get others excited."

Then she heard about Romig. "I can't be more pleased. I can honestly say I'm leaving the site in more-capable hands than my own and with a person who will be able to take it in directions I couldn't."

Romig's selection also thrilled foundation President Jeff Naylor.

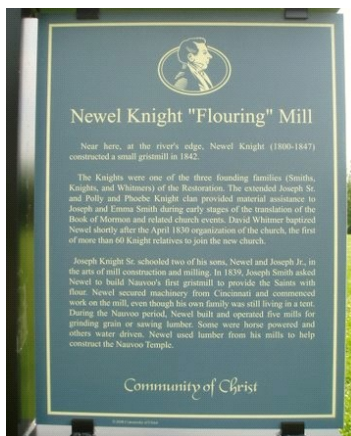
"Ron Romig is coming home," Naylor said. "In doing so, he brings a rich heritage and understanding of the importance of Kirtland to our faith movement—both in the past and today.

"He is well-positioned to build upon Barb's very successful efforts in sharing ministries of stewardship, hospitality, and education to the many visitors to the site, as well as continued collaboration with the Spiritual Formation Center."

To help Romig get a good start, Walden ran a sunrise-to-sunset training regimen for ten days. He pleased her with his knowledge of Saints history and his experience of working within the "Community of Christ audience and others."

*See Romig on Page 5*





## Sign Highlights Mill's Impact

By Greg Clark

The ravages of time long ago claimed the first mill in Nauvoo, Illinois, but because of a new sign at the Joseph Smith Historic Site, visitors still will learn of its importance.

The mill was built at great sacrifice by Newel Knight in 1842, during the early days of the Restoration.

His descendants in the Knight Family Foundation recently donated the laminate, informational sign.

Site official Lach MacKay said the mill was important. He also cited the Knights' role as a founding family in the church.

# Pat Spillman Receives JWHA Honor

By Greg Clark

Pat Spillman, a board member with the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, has devoted much of his life to the pursuit of preserving and teaching history.

In September, he made a little history himself.

Spillman became the sixth recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the John Whitmer Historical Association. It might never have happened if decades earlier a college faculty member hadn't offered him a teaching position as a graduate assistant.

"If I hadn't taken the assistant-teaching position, I might not have even taught history," Spillman said. "I was interested in sociology and political science. My objective at that time was to be a high-school teacher."

Spillman, now 69, eventually did teach, but he spent much of his life working in various positions for Community of Christ. And, he gave years



Pat Spillman

of service to the foundation and association, two groups that seek to fulfill different missions.

While the foundation dedicates itself to preserving and sharing church heritage, Spillman said the JWHA provides a forum for scholarly research in all branches of the Restoration movement.

Spillman has been a member of the JWHA since its inception about thirty-seven years ago at the home of Dick and Barbara Howard. Over the years Spillman served in numerous capacities, including as a board member. He also spent two stints,

spanning roughly nine years, as editor of the *JWHA Journal*.

With the historic-sites foundation, he has served as communications chair, secretary, and treasurer. He also is a past president of the Restoration Trail Foundation, the CCHSF's predecessor.

Bill Russell, the *Journal's* book-review editor, said Spillman was well-suited for the history work, and he praised his editorial talents.

Despite the many achievements, the award surprised Spillman.

"To put me in the same league as Dick Howard, Paul Edwards, and Leonard Arrington—that's pretty rarified territory. It's difficult for me to see myself in the same paragraph as those guys. They're kind of the generals, and I'm like a suitable sergeant."

Russell disagreed. "He would have been president, but for so many years he was editor, and you couldn't ask somebody to do both jobs."

## Romig

Continued from Page 5

She said he holds gifts of patience, humility, and gentleness.

"He enjoys being around people. His patience for process and people are strengths."

Mark Scherer could have told her that. Scherer, the Community of Christ historian

since 1994, credited Romig with helping him make the transition from public teaching.

"He also had a good working knowledge of historiography, and that was instrumental in helping me in the transition. It's integral to the interpretive discipline of history. That should carry over for Ron in Kirtland."

Romig knows the task will bring challenges.

"One big change for me will be no longer just working with sources, but applying interpretation to interaction with people who want to experience the heritage."

Romig's family also understands his passion for history. That's because they share it. His wife, Anne, will serve as a volunteer in Kirtland. And their daughter, Rene, spent two years at Kirtland as an

intern "and came to love the site," Romig said. More recently she helped with exhibits in Nauvoo, Illinois.

Meanwhile, Romig says his new position feels like a good fit.

"This feels like coming home. There's a community here that I loved and enjoyed being part of as a young man, and I'm looking forward to being part of it again."

# TRADITION!



## *Smith Family Descendants Gather Every May, Prepare for Summer*

By Greg Clark

Each year, Anina Luff digs into the sandy soil of the Smith Family Cemetery in Nauvoo, Illinois, to plant flowers in several beds.

Other descendants of the Smith family join her. It's hard work, but it brings joy and peace. It also helps preserve and beautify the Joseph Smith Historic Site, which draws thousands of visitors each year.

This year seven family members gathered on a cool, wet day in mid-May, ready to ease blue salvias, begonias, snapdragons, alyssums, and other plants into the loose earth.

"The older we get . . . it's a little hard on the back," said Anina, a 71-year-old resident of Odessa, Missouri. "But it's such a labor of love, I never cared. I talk to the flowers and tell them how beautiful they are."

The annual effort, which sometimes includes additional projects, usually

*"It's fun telling the story to visitors. They get a funny look on their face when they find out you're a family member."*

—Anina Luff

draws five to ten family members. The tradition, which began when the cemetery was dedicated in 1991, holds special meaning for Anina.

"I felt like we had really connected with our family," she said. "There's something about digging in the same earth that they dug in. I put a lot of things around the Mansion House one year—herbs and things that Emma would have used."

Emma and her husband, church founder Joseph Smith Jr., are among the twenty-four persons buried in the cemetery, which sits about seventy-five feet from the Mississippi River.

Other burials include Joseph's parents, Joseph

Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, along with Joseph Jr.'s brother, Hyrum Smith.

Emma shares a granite headstone with Joseph Jr. and Hyrum, the brothers killed by a mob in 1844 in Carthage, Illinois.

The importance of the beautification work isn't lost on Lach Mackay, a historic-sites official.

He explained that Community of Christ owns the cemetery but the Smith Family Foundation continues to handle the maintenance.

"Any historic site works hard to retain a relationship with the family," said Mackay, Anina's son and himself a Smith family descendant. "Because the Smiths come from a number of religious back-

grounds now, it increases the credibility of the site.

"They've invested considerable financial resources in the cemetery, saving us thousands of dollars.

"They're doing it because they enjoy it, and they think it's important for the cemetery to look good. It's also important...to retain their family heritage."

During the planting, workers like Anina witness first-hand the impact of their efforts.

"It's a very satisfying thing to see the people enjoy the cemetery," she said. "They'll say, 'What a peaceful and serene place!' We put the benches in so people could enjoy it."

She said the workers also act as sort of "impromptu guides."

"It's fun telling the (church and family) story to visitors," she said. "They get a funny look on their faces when they find out you're a family member."



## Board Agenda Is Packed in Plano

By Greg Clark

November's board meeting of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation covered an exhausting array of topics such as World Conference, the budget, and a sesquicentennial reunion.

The board also agreed in principle to hire Barb Walden as the executive director, beginning immediately (see story on Page 1).

The meeting ended after dark at Rogers Hall, next to the Plano Stone Church in Illinois.

At its conclusion, a worn-out Jeff Naylor, the board president, looked at his colleagues and said, "I don't know about you, but my head hurts."

The board agreed to a preliminary budget of \$187,305, up \$84,705 in 2009. The increase, in large part, came from the executive-director position and its support. Other factors included a booth at World Conference and support of the Sesquicentennial Reunion in Brush Creek, Illinois.

The board also discussed hosting donor and volunteer events at World Conference. "We would reconnect with these folks, many of whom haven't heard much from us since 2007," Naylor said.

Several board members said conference was a good place to interest and uplift volunteers.

Also, board members agreed to explore supporting the sesquicentennial reunion. Naylor cited fundraising opportunities



*Rene Romig put a lot of effort into new displays at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois.*

## New Exhibit Gives Boost to Nauvoo

By Greg Clark

Several exhibits, designed by Rene Romig, are helping guests better understand Nauvoo House's historical significance.

Life-size photographs of Lewis Bidamon and Emma Smith Bidamon, hotel proprietors in the 1870s, will greet guests as they enter the building.

Also, displays will tell how Emma used each room as she made the Nauvoo House her home during the last eight years of her life.



The dining-room exhibit is especially impressive because of interpretive text and photographs. The display explores the command to build the house in Nauvoo, Illinois, in the 1840s.

It also covers construction, obstacles, and its long-delayed completion

and opening in the 1870s.

The Nauvoo House, a property of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, continues to host overnight guests. It can handle twenty to sixty-five, and it makes a wonderful base from which to explore Nauvoo.

## Make a Donation, Aid Preservation

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## Liberty Hall Becomes PBS Filming Site

By Greg Clark

It's not unusual for Lamoni, Iowa, to draw crowds of history buffs for its annual Labor Day celebration of Civil War Days.

But this year the event drew something else: a PBS crew that staged part of its filming at Liberty Hall, the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation property.

The PBS crew chose to interview Blake A. Wagner, a Civil War historian who has written several books, inside Liberty Hall. The interview will be part of a documentary being prepared for PBS presentation next year.

Wagner also is an editor, cartographer, and photographer of Civil War history. In Lamoni, he focused on the importance of horses in the war, how they were used, the dangers they faced, and the casualties they suffered. He also discussed famous horses ridden by officers.

He currently is writing a book on the topic.

Civil War Days has become a major event in Lamoni.

## Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation

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## Walden

*Continued from Page 1*

of the items, even if we are finalizing the job description in January."

Walden brings a resume that's loaded. It includes a degree from the Cooperstown Graduate Program in New York, internships at the Baseball Hall of Fame Museum and the Joseph Smith Historic Site, seven years as site director at the Kirtland Temple, lifetime church heritage, and loads of endorsements.

And, of course, that youthful look.

She knows people her

parents' age dominate her profession. That doesn't worry her.

"It allows me a number of opportunities," she said. "Those involved for decades become excited when they see somebody my age showing passion and interest. When other young adults see someone who looks like themselves, in many ways they become excited, too."

Key components of her position will include fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and increasing awareness of the foundation's mission in pre-



serving and promoting historic sites.

While in Kirtland she earned praise for her passionate love of history. Her announcement that she was leaving this fall to support her husband, who received a job in Kentucky, saddened many. Staff members even gave her an autographed apron to wear in her new role as a Kentucky housewife. But about a week before her departure, Naylor phoned her.

"I thought he was calling me to discuss my experience with the foundation," Walden said. "I had no idea he was going to ask me to consider a position."