

# THE FORUM

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

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*Pumps, Sandbags, and . . .*

## **LOTS OF LOVE**



*The Joseph Smith Historic Site took on a new appearance with lots of sand and hundreds of sandbags*

## **Nauvoo Staff, Volunteers Fight against Floodwaters**

By Greg Clark

In the end, the rising Mississippi River wasn't strong enough to overcome the love of staff members and volunteers who protected the Joseph Smith Historic Site from spring and summer floods.

Because of their sweat, dedication, and passion, no severe damage was done to historic properties in Nauvoo, Illinois. That's not to say there wasn't lots of worrying.

Apostle Lach Mackay,

*See Nauvoo on page 6*



## **They Bring Sawdust, Sweat, Support**

By Greg Clark

Their days are filled with sawdust and paint, hammers and nails, sweat and dirt. And members of the Community of Christ RV Association wouldn't have it any other way.

These travelers gather—usually in the spring and fall—from across the country. In

their wake, they leave spiffed-up historic sites, campgrounds, churches—and lots of friends, goodwill, and happy memories.

"Most of us, being retired, have time, and we've learned some skills over the years that

*See RV Association on page 7*

# What Stories They Told at World Conference!



## Special Panel of Guests Delights Crowd with Tales of Temple

By Greg Clark

The gathering of six special people April 6 could not have been more appropriate. They were helping mark the 25th anniversary of the Temple's dedication in Independence, Missouri. Their mere presence offered a look into the edifice's past, an understanding of the present, and its hopes for the future.

The Storytellers event, sponsored by the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, helped kick off the World Conference's opening-day celebration.

The six special guests were Wallace B. Smith, church president *emeritus*; Dennis Piepergerdes, former member of the Presiding Bishopric; Norm Swails, former presiding bishop; Peter Judd, former member of the First Presidency; Angela Ramirez, president and financial officer of the Dominican Republic Mission Center; and Brittany Mangelson, an adult con-

vert and social media seeker specialist.

They drew a crowd, filling the entire lower section of the 1,600-seat Temple Sanctuary with overflow in the balcony. "Although the stories reflect on the past," said Barbara Walden, executive director of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, "we pray they'll help us glimpse where God is leading us into the future."

All the speakers offered touching and insightful observations of experiences with the Temple and its impact on their lives. However, the words of President Smith stood out.

"It's difficult to believe that 25 years and more have gone by since we started planning," he began.

"It was a time of unrest and upheaval, an unpopular war, changing women's roles, and a changing understanding of the church's mission. As president and prophet I was much distressed. But the Spirit impressed on me more and more that a

Temple dedicated to teaching, healing, and reconciling was needed.”

That passion became part of Section 156, which called for the Temple. President Smith recalled that “the universal nature” of the spiral shape struck an immediate chord with leaders.

He said the Temple’s dedication emphasized that it wasn’t to be only for worship and renewal, but that it was important to go outward with ministry. Then he added:

“There is a possibility of future understanding that goes beyond what I have enjoyed.”

And with that he received a standing ovation. It was a tough act to follow, but each speaker offered heartfelt stories of the Temple and its force.

**Piepergerdes** read six touching letters of amazing sacrificial generosity. They depicted a people dedicated to their God and their church, learning to give to their true capacity.

**Swails** told of being present at the presentation of Section 156. He said he turned to his wife, Darlene, and said, “Wow, somebody is going to have a whale of a job.”

Little did he know it would be him. Over time he became chiefly responsible for the campaign that funded construction. Another minister told him:

“What you’re being called to do will not be a temporal gift, but a spiritual one.”

**Judd** recognized that the building had been a dream and hope for generations. But what about the future? “I thought, Now that we have it...”

He chaired the Temple Organ Committee, played a role in numerous pre-dedicatory events, and always kept mission in his mind.

“From the beginning,” he said, “the Temple ministries have expanded beyond what occurs in this building.”

**Ramirez** recalled being at the ground-breaking. “It was very cold and windy, but the joy on our faces could be seen all around. We didn’t understand the language very well, but



*Storyteller guests were invited to visit the foundation’s booth.*

we still worshiped...We were believing the voice of God.

She emphasized that the Temple’s impact extends far beyond the Independence city boundaries. “What the Temple means is almost unexplainable. This Temple inspires me to bring peace and justice to my surroundings.”

**Mangelson** came from another faith tradition, and “I wondered if I could find empowerment” in the Temple. She received “immediate hospitality” the first time she entered the Temple. “I realized I was considered worthy in this space, and so were (my children).”

Now she’s in the seminary program. “My journey into Community of Christ has been difficult...but the journey has been worth it. I knew I could not keep quiet about this.”

Presiding Bishop Stassi Cramm’s closing prayer brought home the importance of continuing to seek and give ministry through the Temple, continuing to tell stories about its impact, and continuing to offer the Spirit’s guidance.



# History Impact Felt in Many Activities

By Greg Clark

The presence of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation permeated the church's World Conference in Independence, Missouri.

The biggest influence in the April event was seen in a crowded Temple Sanctuary for a Storytellers session that featured six people with profound tales about the Temple's influence in the past, present, and future.

"I was excited by the stories of impact that the Temple has had," said Karen Graham Wade, the foundation's board president. "It re-enforced my appreciation for our Enduring Principle of Pursuit of Peace."

But though this was the most visible event, the foundation's presence was felt in many other ways.

Consider the Village Expo, a gathering of booths representing church groups, affiliates, and like-minded organizations. The foundation shared a space with the Church History and Sacred Story Team.

Banners attracted passers-by, who soon found numerous resources, pamphlets, and brochures that touted foundation activities.

An iPad demonstrated the new 3D virtual tours offered at the Kirtland Temple. A flyer described the Alma Blair Internship Program. A small book focused on *Children in Church History*. Another book, *Tuesday Tales in Church History*, brought stories alive.

"It's nice to have a booth of good size," board member Sally Roth said. "We hope to achieve awareness of who we are and how to reach out. We want people to realize there are resources here, and we can help them connect with history."

Traffic at the booth, which also featured life-size cutouts of historic figures (wearing Conference lanyards and



*Barbara Walden, executive director of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation was thrilled with the impact of history on World Conference.*

badges), was beyond brisk.

"We have been busy," admitted Barbara Walden, executive director of the foundation. "Yesterday we just about got run over!"

In addition, the foundation sponsored appreciation lunches for donors, site volunteers, field representatives, and other supporters.

And, of course, supporters—all wearing foundation garb—were highly visible as ushers at an evening hymn fest.

"To me this is continuing our sacred story," Walden said. "Coming to an event like World Conference and seeing people from all over, you can see that we're a global church."



*"Delegates" flashed badges and posed with 2019 guests.*

# Giving to the Future, Saving the Past

By Greg Clark

Tom and Susan Webber can see the future by gazing into the past.

The couple from La Conner, Washington, have become regular givers to the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation because of what they believe it can do for generations yet to come.

Yes, they've enjoyed visiting the sites, but they also feel passionate about supporting internships that deepen the discipleship, education, and testimonies of young adults.

"The foundation connects with our faith movement, and it takes resources and good people to keep things going," said Tom. "...When we act on our beliefs as a community, more good things can happen. People are supported, people's lives are enriched, and our own testimonies are solidified.

"The organization is looking to the future to educate other younger people to continue storytelling about who we are, where we come from, and how we fit in the world. That's a good cause that makes me want to give. The foundation isn't just a tour agency; it's much more. They're dedicated to enriching people's lives through testimony and storytelling."

Though the foundation "isn't just a tour agency," Tom and Susan acknowledge the great impact various tours have had on their lives.

"For me personally, I'm connected spiritually through the history of the church," Susan said. "And spiritual formation has been an important part of our faith journey. I think I'm connected spiritually anywhere where I know Community of Christ has expressed its hopes and dreams.

"I would say it's connected to my growing awareness as I'm getting older that even though historic sites are physical places, they provide a connection to people for spiritual needs, not only with our faith group, but others."

Barbara Walden, executive director



of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, said the Webbers began joining the tours in 2016. "Little did I know we would travel to England and experience zionic community together on two additional tours. Tom and Susan are a joy to travel with and to know as friends."

The Webbers, both elders, said their favorite tour was last year's trip to the British Isles. But they said their favorite event came on another tour when they served Communion in the Kirtland Temple in Ohio. They also raved about other tour aspects.

"Barbara Walden is a professional in how she can find places for US history and church history," Susan said. "It's not just a matter of going over and over again to Nauvoo and Kirtland. We end up in all sorts of places that are significant parts of US history, too."

Susan commented on the foundation's work in preserving history. "I think it's important for all ages, particularly youth, to start being connected to something that's larger than themselves and even larger than their own congregation or church group."

Walden agrees. "Donors like Tom and Susan are the lifeline of all that we do at the foundation. Their passion for sharing church history and preserving the historic sites resonates with others and energizes the staff. Their incredible generosity shows in our educational resources, Storyteller events, young-adult internships, and in the maintenance and preservation of the historic sites.

"We could not provide foundation services and support to the historic sites without generous donors like Tom and Susan."

## Nauvoo

*Continued from page 1*

Community of Christ Historic Sites director, said the concerns began with March blizzards in the upper Midwest. The worry didn't dissipate until the US Army Corps of Engineers said in mid-July that it was safe to remove flood-prevention structures.

"For several months, heavy rain in the middle of the night meant getting up and starting the gasoline-powered pumps that supplement the electric pumping system for the Nauvoo House cellar," Mackay said. "Once started, we had to put on life jackets and scale the levee to inspect the hoses and make sure they were not cutting through the plastic protecting the levee from erosion. We would also need to refuel the pumps as needed."

The five pumps and plastic weren't the only protective efforts. Workers used 125 tons of sand to fill hundreds of white, nylon bags and provide other protection.

Volunteers included members of the Community of Christ RV Association, World Conference delegates passing through Nauvoo on the way to Independence, Missouri, and 25 sister missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Combined, they raised the levee by two feet.

"We are extremely grateful for all of the help we received," Mackay said. Others agreed.

"When the river rises, we need all hands on deck in Nauvoo," said Barbara Walden, executive director of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Association. "The more hands, the greater the efforts at preserving the historic structures, family cemetery, and landscapes along the river. The tireless efforts of



the volunteers and staff are appreciated by current and future generations."

Added Karen Graham Wade, foundation president: "A mere 'thank you' can never express our deep gratitude for their efforts in preserving this sacred place."

The historic site remained open throughout, but Mackay said several bridges closed, forcing visitors to take creative routes to reach Nauvoo.

Unfortunately, this drill has become increasingly frequent.

"Two of the four highest flood crests on record occurred in 2019, and five of the top 10 crests have occurred since...2007," Mackay said. "The 2019 flood also broke the record for the longest duration, a record that had stood since the great flood of 1927."

All that water emphasized an en-



during truth: "Natural emergencies," Mackay said, "seem to bring out the best in people."

## RV Association

*Continued from page 1*

give us opportunity to give back and provide ministry that helps fulfill needs," said Duane Wheaton, the association president. "Typically, we're making things better for those who come behind us."

Projects include carpentry, hanging sheetrock, painting, landscaping, gardening, plumbing, and much, much more. Add it up, and these traveling volunteers have saved the historic sites hundreds of thousands of dollars since forming in 2000.

"What would we do without the talents and dedication of the members of the RV Association!" said Karen Graham Wade, president of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation. "They not only save the historic sites untold amounts of money by providing professional-quality maintenance and repairs, they provide those services with love and compassion for our past, so we can share our story well into the future."

Projects bolster properties such as the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois; Liberty Hall in Lamoni, Iowa; and Heritage Plaza in Independence, Missouri. Sometimes the work is relatively simple; other times it's downright nasty, such as crawling underneath part of the William Marks house in Nauvoo.

So what do these workers get out of it?

"The camaraderie is one thing, but there's also the appreciation we feel from the people we're working for," Wheaton said. "Lach (Mackay, who

### How to Help

To learn more about the Community of Christ RV Association or volunteer to help, contact President Duane Wheaton at (816) 769-1156 or visit [www.CofChrstrva.weebly.com](http://www.CofChrstrva.weebly.com).



*Volunteers do restoration work on the Clark house in Nauvoo.*

oversees historic sites for the church) is a person who can't say enough. That's a payback right there, when they appreciate us, that's a good thing."

That appreciation is genuine. Just ask Barbara Walden, executive director of the foundation: "They are the hardest workers around, and we greatly appreciate all they do to preserve and maintain the historic sites. When the RVA comes to town, we are able to achieve so much more thanks to their skills and tireless labor."

And Mackay routinely gives compliments like this summation he offered in 2012:

"I can't overstate the impact the RVA's volunteer efforts have had on our historic sites. They have completed ma-

ior projects, saving the church many thousands of dollars. They also have focused on small items that cumulatively have a major impact on a visitor's first impression.

"They don't just talk discipleship; they live it."

And they get a lot out of it.

"The people we work with, members of the organization, we become pretty close," said Woody Wilson, the project chairman. Though members hail from places like Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Connecticut, Wilson said that many "try to spend time together and go camping. People in Nauvoo and other places become very good

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## Make a Donation, Aid Preservation

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

*To help the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation fulfill that mission, call (217) 453-2246 to make a donation.*

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

*You also can donate at [www.HistoricSitesFoundation.org](http://www.HistoricSitesFoundation.org).*

## Volunteers Needed

*To volunteer at a historic site supported by the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, call Lachlan Mackay at (217) 453-2246 or email him at [lmackay@CofChrist.org](mailto:lmackay@CofChrist.org).*

## Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation

P.O. Box 338  
Nauvoo, IL 62354

## RV Association

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friends. It's a social thing as well as working with them.

"There's a lot of camaraderie, a lot of fun. We have devotions at 8:45 in the morning, start work at 9:00, and have games in the evening after supper. A lot of people have become very close friends."

But there's a problem. These folks, who are so good at helping, could use some help themselves.

Wilson notes that "membership is dwindling."

Wheaton added: "We've had to scale back to meet the capabilities of folks here now."

Though membership totals more than 100, most are donors, rather than workers. The number of project volunteers usually varies from 14 to 24. Helpers can contribute for anything from a weekend to a month.

"We look at the project and see what it takes manpower-wise and given the length of time," Wheaton said.



*Liberty Hall looks much brighter thanks to the RV Association.*

"Sometimes we have to call around and arm-twist if we're a little light."

He emphasizes that couples "don't really have to have an RV, just an interest in the project. We usually can find housing for them."

He also said if folks have few skills or little experience, "we'll still find ways to utilize them. They can help keep the area clean, and we've taught people a lot of skills over the years."