

THE FORUM

Wendie Jenkins is ready to volunteer. Page 2.



Community of Christ
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Ready, Set, Go!

After Two-year Closure, Sites Eager to Reopen

By Greg Clark

It's been a long time since anyone walked through the front doors of the Red Brick Store at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois, and asked for a root beer.

It's been a long time since anyone quietly crept into the Kirtland Temple in Ohio and reverently admired the grandeur of the Lower Court.

And it's been a long time since guests visited Joseph Smith III's Liberty Hall in La-

moni, Iowa; wandered among the buildings of Heritage Plaza in Independence, Missouri; or boarded a bus for one of the famous tours led by the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation.

Yes, it's been a long time since the COVID-19 pandemic forced closure of all these historic properties and programs in early 2020.

But now the wait—seemingly interm-

See Reopening on page 7



Dr. William Moore displays one of the many preaching charts that have captivated him.

Preaching Charts: Sophisticated Folk Art

By Greg Clark

You can call preaching charts—many more than a century old—the ultimate visual aids.

But to others the charts, stored in the Community of Christ Archives, are so much more.

To Dr. William D. Moore they're "the stuff of American spiritual traditions."

To photographer Valerie Anderson they're "friends...representing sacred spaces."

To Apostle Lachlan Mackay they're "folk art, rare and really huge—20 feet or more."

These charts—more than 100—often were filled with words and images of gospel stories, church doctrine, and painted scenes that reflected the life of the church. They were mainstays for missionaries seeking converts and ministers trying to buttress the faith of their flocks from the 1880s to 1930s.

Today they're part of a preservation project that strives to help people under-

See Preaching Charts on page 4

Volunteer Wendie Jenkins Ready to Hit the Road

By Greg Clark

Wendie Jenkins' little Ford hybrid is ready to roll.

With an eye at least partly toward volunteering at the Kirtland Temple in Ohio, she recently put new tires on her car for the 2,100–2,200-mile trip from her home in Phoenix, Arizona.

The trip was an annual event for Wendie in pre-pandemic times. Each morning from mid-August through mid-November, she got up, put on a blue shirt that says Kirtland Temple, and stepped into her "second life."

Jenkins, who retired from the Arizona Department of Health Services, volunteered to give tours, work in the Mercantile, and do other tasks. And she loved it.

"I definitely want to come back," Wendie said.

"It's sort of like I have two lives. I come here, and it's like I have a foot in history, so then I say, 'What are we doing in our own time to build community?' We can't just look back. I'm in search of a way to build a community now."

She has found that working at the Temple keeps her physically—and spiritually—fit.

Of course, the arrival of COVID-19 proved an obstacle, forcing a two-year closure of the properties supported by the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation.

"I missed being there," Wendie said. "When I'm in Kirtland I feel like I'm living in the past and the present with an opportunity to talk to lots of different people. I feel like looking back in history kind of informs our present."

"I think about community when I think of Kirtland. We have struggled with community in our walled-off era, especially during the pandemic. I have a women's group that stopped meeting during the pandemic, and we're back together. It's so much better than emails—seeing their faces and catching up with them in person."

Wendie's passion with Kirtland started in 2015, when she took a bus

tour sponsored by the foundation. When the group arrived in Kirtland, "they divided us in half, and my group went right up to the attic. I was amazed the guides could go all the way up there and have the breath to talk."

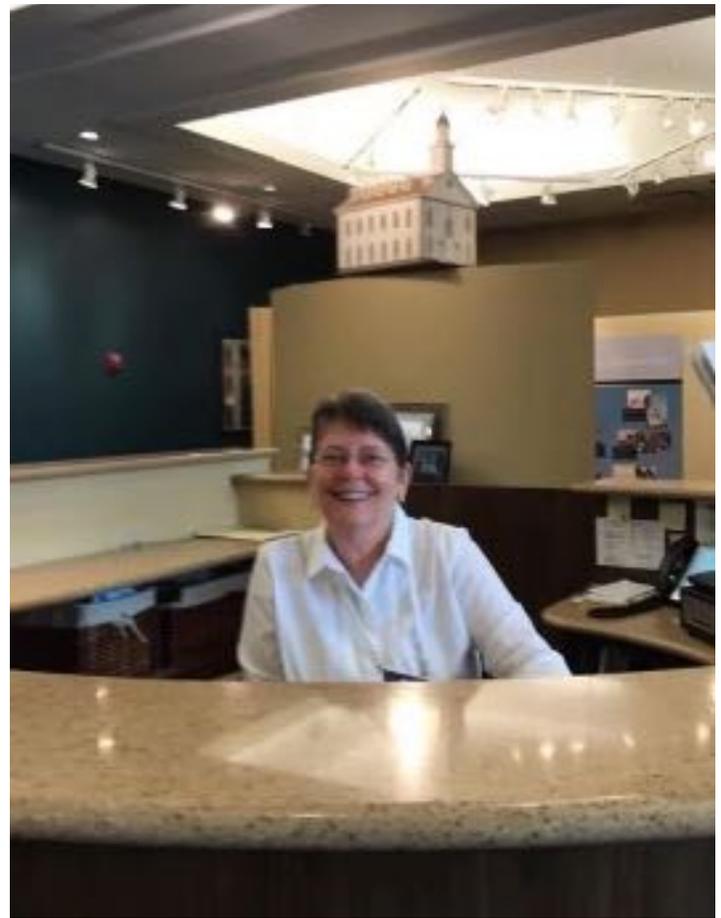
Now she gives the tours, and she finds she has plenty of air to chat.

"Each year I really looked forward to Wendie's arrival and was sorry to see her go, because she is so cheerful and happy to help," said Seth Bryant, former site director. "She is willing to help fill in exactly when we need her, arriving right when our summer interns depart. When she leaves, about the time it turns cold here, things have slowed down immensely—so she really is a lifesaver in her willingness to serve when she does, and a really delightful person to work with."

Bryant noted another benefit of volunteering at the church's historic sites. "One of our great challenges in life is to see beyond ourselves. Leading people on tours who come from all over the country and who have ideas different than your own is an excellent opportunity to overcome selfishness and tribalism...Our volunteers often...are greeting people from all over the world. It really does change you, if you let it."

Jenkins knows about travel from her trips between Phoenix and Kirtland. She said that spending hours on the road is far from tedious. "I have audio books, so it's a really nice trip."

Besides her official duties, Jenkins savors the time between tours, "chatting with people, answering questions. Often



the more-spontaneous discussions have been more satisfying to me. When not touring, I also enjoy reading books in the library."

Bryant says volunteers like Jenkins, an elder, are essential to the historic sites.

"Honestly, we couldn't run them without our volunteers. In Kirtland, for example, we only have two full-time paid employees, which is nowhere near what we need to run the site and care for the grounds. But our volunteers make the operation possible."

"We could always use more volunteers in the spring in Kirtland. And...in Nauvoo, there is a definite need for volunteers overall."

For her part, Jenkins says volunteering is important "because our historic sites are important. We need not only to maintain them structurally, but have people who can present them to visitors. Without volunteers who enjoy delving into the past and maintaining the stories, there would be no reason to keep the structures or remember."

Connections Proved Key for Mesle-Morain

By Greg Clark

In conversation with Sherry Mesle-Morain, a phrase surfaces repeatedly: "People who love me and love to meddle in my life."

Perhaps these words suit Sherry so well because they speak of relationship, action, and caring. And perhaps that's why the phrase is so appropriate to her role as a board member with the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation.

Sherry joined the board in June 2020. Barbara Walden, the foundation's executive director, said: "She hit the ground running and became really involved, from giving an online lecture to helping in a core group of active, engaged board members. She has proven to be an awesome editor. She has been a real asset in helping plan a lecture series."

All that energy has been necessary because of COVID-19, which in 2020 and 2021 forced closure of all properties supported by the foundation. With their reopening hoped for in 2022, a new set of problems may await.

"When people haven't been someplace for a long time," Sherry said, "they sometimes forget about it. Barb has done a wonderful job with lectures and book discussions. I suppose some people will just run to visit again, and others won't think about going."

"I live in Lamoni, Iowa, where Liberty Hall is. I know (Site Director) Steve Smith) is anxious to have visitors. There's no reason for Liberty Hall (to exist) if you don't have visitors. It's the job of the foundation to give

people a reason to go, to remind people to go."

Sherry pointed out, however, that sometimes things like COVID-19 bring an opportunity to accomplish things that otherwise might not get done. Those "things" include not only lecture series and book discussions, but repairs at the sites.

Sherry's acceptance of the board position seemed to be a natural extension of her relationships. In her biography statement with the board, she wrote: "People who love me and love to meddle in my life reminded me that preserving the historic sites is preserving my own heritage and an historic immersion in my community."

Those who carried a strong influence in her life included, her father. Carl Mesle was a well-known figure in the church, community activist, and former pastor at the Stone Church in Independence, Missouri. Also, a brother-in-law, the late Tom Morain, had served on the board.

And then there's Karen Graham Wade, a longtime friend and former president of the board. "Karen called first, and we chatted," Sherry recalled. "Then I talked to some friends, my family...Tom Morain. People that I care about. They all said, 'Sherry, this is your heritage.'"

Sherry, who retired in 2008 as director of Financial Aid Services at Graceland University, did not major in history while in college. But "I love history. I love politics, which is history in the making."

That love of history aids her on the board and carries over into her leisure activities. When she moved to Lamoni 25 years ago, she joined the oldest quilting group in Iowa, which formed in the 1800s.

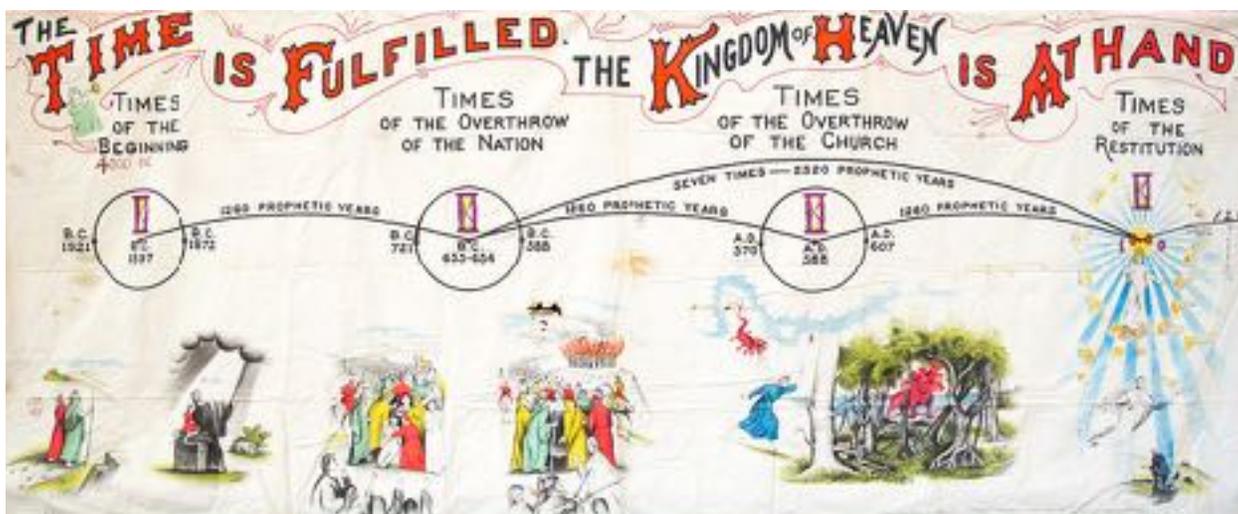
"They were a remarkable group of women who got things done."

But the pandemic interrupted that activity, too. "We did not meet regularly during COVID," Sherry said. "We've started meeting all together now. Stitching is a soothing activity, and I enjoy the camaraderie."

She also enjoys traveling, volunteering, and reading everything from newspapers to mysteries.

But through it all, she most cares about those "people who love me and love to meddle in my life."





The many preaching charts photographed by Valerie Anderson offer a glimpse into earlier eras of the church. Some concepts depicted don't mesh with today's understanding, but they provide valuable context and insight into development of the church over the years.



Charts

Continued from page 1

stand more of their early heritage while seeing how the church has evolved.

"The history nerd in me gets a thrill whenever we hear that another collection of images has dropped," said Barbara Walden, executive director of the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation. "It's fantastic from a historic standpoint and for visual learners, such as seminary classes...These help us understand the journey we have been on, and why we're doing what we're doing."

The task of documenting the charts and preserving them photographically has involved numerous people, including some outside the Community of Christ tradition.

For example, Moore is director of the American & New England Studies Program at Boston University and associate professor in the Department of History of Arts & Architecture.

And he's fascinated with the charts.

"My academic specialty is...looking at the material culture, the stuff of American spiritual traditions," Moore said. "I'm also broadly interested in American religious art and architecture."

His studies led him to preaching charts, which led to the Archives at the Temple in Independence, Missouri.

"I...was just so excited to find all the charts in the back room that had never been photographed or documented. It

was a cache of jewels, a cache of treasures. As a scholar, it's always exciting to bring new material to the fore."

Or in this case, very old materials.

He's especially taken by about 15 charts made by George Weston.

"They are pretty sophisticated works of art that have loops on them so they can be hung. They are not amateur undertakings."

His favorite chart is titled "The Two Ways," which describes the broad and narrow paths people choose to follow.

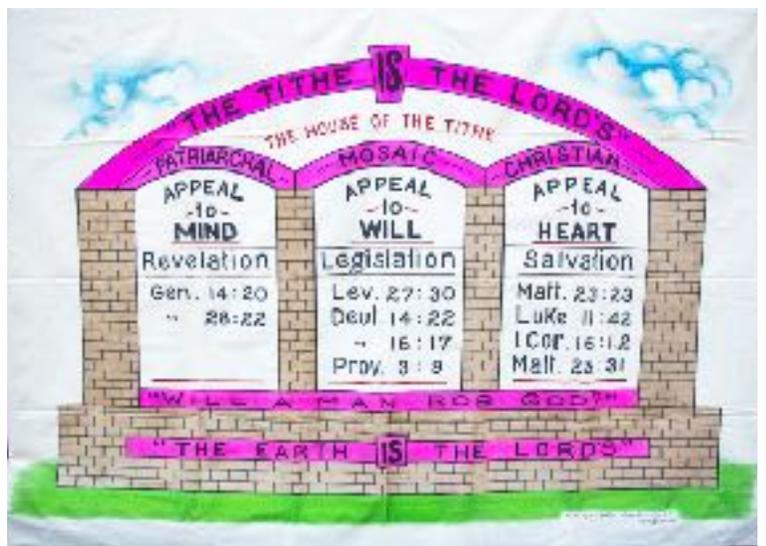
He said Weston has another series called "The Lord's Vineyard." It's...about the history of faith, the biblical church (Adam, Noah, Christ) all the way up to Joseph Smith. I'm able to link these into broader American religious traditions."

He says preservation is important because the charts "give insights into the way the denomination functioned in that period. They express graphically the beliefs of the church at that point and tell us a bit about the physical life of the church."

Moore was instrumental in landing a grant to help preserve the charts photographically. But there was a problem.

"How do you photograph something 20 feet long in a way that is helpful?" asked Mackay, the church's director of historic sites. "You're not going to do it with an iPhone."

That's where Anderson, a Kansas City photographer with an LDS background, became involved. The project of photographing 35-40 of the charts was daunting. During the



Photographer Valerie Anderson estimates that she captured 1,300 to 1,400 images by working on each chart in sections and as a whole. Charts, which she came to know as “friends,” were done in many formats, using crayons, pencils, paint, and more. She calls them “memorials to people who were part of the story.”



pandemic, she would take them to the empty gym of her church next to the LDS Temple in Kansas City.

“I would clip them to the curtain of a stage. It took a few months to get them all done. Some charts would take 40–50 images.”

She would try to shoot an entire chart in one photo. Then she would photograph them in pieces—trying to capture every word, phrase, or graphic—so the images could be stitched together on a computer. Her estimated photo count: 1,300–1,400.

“You could tell the different periods, based on the type of graphics. One had gangsters from the ‘20s or ‘30s with cars and suits like from the ‘Godfather’—evil in the world. Then others would have pioneers walking around.”

After spending hours alone with the charts, they “kind of became my friends. In photographing I like to follow the Holy Ghost. I need to listen with my eyes. For me that’s how the Holy Ghost speaks. I think that’s why photographing the charts was a sacred moment to me.”

“To me they are sacred spaces, memorials to people who were part of the story, and the locations themselves were sa-

cred. So they’re important to members of the church today.”

However, Mackay emphasized that the charts need to be observed with an eye toward historical context. He noted that our understandings have evolved in the decades since they were made.

“We sometimes kind of think these are funny and little embarrassing because they don’t represent our theology today,” he said, “but then somebody outside the church will see them and think they’re *amazing*.”

“We understand their importance from a historical standpoint.”

Do You Have a Preaching Chart?

If you or your congregation has a preaching chart, Dr. William D. Moore urges that you contact him at Boston University in Massachusetts or Rachel Killebrew at the Temple in Independence,

Your Generosity Makes a Big Difference

By Barbara Walden

On a warm August day, I had the privilege of walking the Kirtland Temple grounds. Nancy Cervi, a faithful volunteer there, greeted me. She and fellow volunteer Steve Davidson have served as enthusiastic gardeners and dedicated landscape architects over the past 18 months.

I was stunned by the beauty and grandeur of the Temple gardens. The glorious greens, reds, purples, and pinks of Mother Nature's blooms quietly embraced the towering Kirtland Temple from every direction. It was breathtaking. Yet, there was a twinge of sadness in seeing the closed Temple doors.

The Kirtland Temple and all Community of Christ historic sites are temporarily closed for visitor safety due to COVID-19. Our journey with COVID-19 over the past 18 months has been challenging. The loss of revenue from site-preservation fees and museum store sales is unprecedented. The historic sites—generally bustling throughout the spring, summer, and fall—have been eerily quiet.

It's been a difficult year because we typically rely on the generosity of visitors to sustain the preservation and maintenance of the sites. Yet, even as we face these unique challenges, I find comfort in Doctrine and Covenants 162:3a:

"Do not be discouraged. You have not been promised an easy path, but you have been assured that the Spirit that

calls you will also accompany you."

If anything is consistent in our church history, it is that we are a community with a long history of change and adapting to unexpected challenges.



Our headquarters moved four times in the first nine years of our church history! Our name once literally included the word *Reorganized*. After more than 190 years, we should be experts at handling change!

Like those of the past, today's staff at the historic sites and the Historic Sites Foundation adapted to the limitations caused by COVID-19. We devel-

oped an abundance of online programs: church history lectures, book-discussion groups, hymn festivals, virtual tours, and classes. Not even COVID-19 could stop us from sharing church history!

Although the sites temporarily are closed, the grounds are open. Walking the grounds with Nancy (socially distancing, of course) was in many ways reinvigorating. We witnessed the beauty of God's creation in the nature that surrounds the historic landmark and were gently reminded of the role our historic sites play as symbols of our continuing journey as a faith community.

Nancy shared how the gardens have been a blessing throughout COVID-19. The benches and shade have served as resting places, refuges, and places of spiritual restoration. Despite the temporary closures, our historic sites continue to bless many.

As we continue to work toward becoming self-sustaining, I invite you to consider increasing your support to the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation at a time when your donations are greatly needed and appreciated. Your generosity allows us to continue preserving and maintaining the sites for future generations.

We want the next generation to experience Community of Christ's heritage—like I did this summer with Nancy—and have the opportunity to quietly reflect on the blessings and lessons embedded in our shared history.

Reopening

Continued from page 1

inable—is about to end.

“We have every intention of opening at the beginning of March,” said Apostle Lachlan Mackay, director of historic properties for the church. He’s been focusing on recruiting the large band of volunteers necessary to reopen and run the properties. An opening exception will be Liberty Hall, which is planning to reopen April 1.

For lovers and supporters of church history, the properties’ reopening will carry as much excitement and anticipation as a child feels before diving into presents under the tree on Christmas morning.

Count Barbara Walden, the foundation’s executive director, among them.

“I’ve stayed pretty close to home and have been grounded during the pandemic,” she said. “But I did go to Kirtland recently and walked the grounds; I didn’t go inside.

“The feeling of being back in Kirtland is indescribable—to see the towering Temple and flowers. For me, personally, was hope the pandemic wouldn’t last forever. And just as the flowers were coming up in the ground, our volunteers

and visitors would return as well.”

Volunteers are especially needed in Nauvoo and Kirtland. After all, it takes a lot of help to host 100,000 guests a year.

“Our volunteers have continued to age during the pandemic,” Mackay said.

“Our volunteer base is deeply devoted and passionate, but sometimes their physical limitations are catching up. So in addition to the folks we have, we need a new crop to help us tell the story.

See Reopening on page 8



The Joseph Smith Historic Site’s buildings have been closed, but the location remained popular for prom photos.

Your Contributions Help Preserve, Share Heritage

People give to the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation for many reasons.

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.

No matter your reason for giving, we deeply appreciate your support. You can mail donations to P.O. Box 338, Nauvoo, IL 62354. You also can donate your gifts online at www.HistoricSitesFoundation.org/donate.

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/donate.

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.

Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation

P.O. Box 338
Nauvoo, IL 62354

Reopening

Continued from page 7

Volunteers generally fall into two categories: those who do maintenance, and those who help offer tours and historic interpretation.

Workers have taken advantage of the pandemic to catch up on deferred maintenance. Training for historical interpreters will start online during the approaching winter.

Historic Sites Need Volunteers; Want to Learn More?

Wondering how to fill that empty time on your hands? Here's a possibility.

If you're interested in volunteering at one of the church's historic properties, particularly in Nauvoo, Illinois, or Kirtland, Ohio, contact Apostle Lachlan Mackay. He can be reached at lmackay@CofChrist.org or (440) 339-6398.

"Like everyone else during the pandemic, we've gotten much better at meeting online," Mackay said.

Walden also praised the increased online resources, such as ongoing lecture series, that were prompted by the pandemic.

"It's a challenge to encourage people to go to the sites when the sites are closed," she said. "Now we can warmly invite people to come experience church history first-hand. I'll be happily encouraging people to go to the sites to experience church history."

She also hopes she'll be able to encourage them to join next fall in an 11-day bus tour, "Women in Church History." Dates and prices could be set soon.

Meanwhile, Walden is trying to figure out how to incorporate the online blessings started during the pandemic with personal encounters.

"We want to continue the momentum of online events. But in person you can create long-lasting relationships. So 2022 will be year of challenge to balance the events."

Help Support the Alma Blair Internship Program

Since the 1970s, young adults from all over the world have served as summer interns and fellows at the Kirtland Temple and Joseph Smith Historic Site.

Besides deepening their understanding of church history, the summer interns acquire skills in historical interpretation, public speaking, and team management.

It is truly a life-changing experience. We would love to expand the internship program to become a year-round experience for young adults.

Please help by donating to the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation.

Donations may be made at www.HistoricSitesFoundation.org/donate or through the mail at P.O. Box 338, Nauvoo, IL 62354.