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Shaker Seminar 2008

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Shaker Seminar 2008

By Christian Goodwillie

The Shaker Seminar reconvened on Wednesday, July 23rd, 2008 within the friendly confines of Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. The 34th meeting of the Seminar was the second organized under the joint auspices of Hancock Shaker Village and Hamilton College. The outstanding facilities at Hamilton enabled speakers to share their talks and accompanying digital presentations in a more technically advanced way than ever before. The lecture hall of the Science Building with its large screen, stepped seating, amplification, digital projectors, and air conditioning (!) made for a considerably more comfortable experience among long-time Seminar attendees who are used to sweating it out in old buildings and trying to stay awake while lulled by the soft whir of the cooling fan of a slide projector.

Things got off to a great start on Wednesday evening with a joint presentation by Jose M. Kozan and Iara Beduschi Kozan titled “The New Virtual White Water Shaker Village: Shaping a Collaborative Network for Shaker History on the Web.” Jose gave a notable presentation at the Seminar in Cincinnati in 2005 when he showed the original digital reconstruction of the North Family at White Water. We were happy to have him back, along with his wife, to demonstrate the new 3D modeling processes being used by The Center for the Electronic Reconstruction of Historic and Archaeological Sites to digitally render the buildings of White Water in a new and exciting way. Dr. Kozan also initiated a broad discussion of the role of the internet in making resources related to the study of the Shakers available to the public. Dinner followed in the Science Center’s atrium. Seminar participants shared a meal with Joe Urgo, Dean of Faculty at Hamilton College, who welcomed the group heartily. The meal included such regional specialties as Utica Greens and Chicken Riggies. The high standard set by the catering staff at Hamilton that night continued to be met throughout the Seminar with more delicious lunches and dinners.

On Thursday morning we assembled at Hamilton College’s Burke Library for a special tour of highlights from its Communal Societies Collection. Noted Shaker dealer David D. Newell and Shaker scholar/collector Walter Brumm assisted Library director Randy Ericson in presenting treasures from the collection at three different stations. Among the items on display were eighteenth-century Shaker and anti-Shaker

imprints, as well as mid-nineteenth-century broadsides used to advertise the performances of the apostate Shaker dancers. Later in the morning the Seminar traveled to the Oneida Community Mansion House. There we heard a lecture from Community descendant Giles Wayland-Smith titled “Twin Visions: Shakers and the Oneida Community.” Giles explored the Oneida Community’s perceptions of the Shakers using a number of written sources dating from the second half of the nineteenth century. Mansion House curator Tony Wonderley followed with an informative overview of the history of the Oneida community. Peter Hoehnle rounded out the morning’s talks in his entertaining style with “What’s Love Got to Do With It?: The Oneida Community, 1838–1881,” a frequently hilarious discussion of Oneida Community history, theology, and personalities. The Seminar then took some time to explore the Mansion House before enjoying a delicious (if somewhat lengthy) lunch. On Thursday evening Hamilton College hosted a special reception for the Seminar back at the Burke Library. Randy Ericson started off the evening with a presentation on Hamilton’s project to digitize its collections of Shaker photographs and ephemera. A discussion followed on ways in which the Seminar group and other interested scholars could contribute their knowledge to Hamilton’s efforts to catalog the collection. Seminar members were then invited upstairs to share beer, wine, and cheese. Mario De Pillis and Christian Goodwillie took the opportunity to sign many copies of their new book *Gather Up the Fragments: The Andrews Shaker Collection* for members of the Seminar.

Friday morning the Seminar gathered once again in the auditorium of the Science Building for two presentations on Shaker scholars/collectors Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews. Professor De Pillis started the morning off with his lecture “The Andrews Shaker Collection: Saving a Culture.” Mario knew the Andrewses personally, and his reminiscences colored his informative lecture on their lives and careers. Hancock Shaker Village Curator Christian Goodwillie followed with a talk called “Gather Up the Fragments: The Andrews Shaker Collection,” which explored the Andrewses’ relationships with the Shakers and how those interactions shaped their collecting activities. After a lunch served in the atrium of the Science Center we began the afternoon with Glendyne Wergland’s talk “Put a Cap On It: Chastity and the Shaker Cap.” Glendyne’s talk brought together material culture, theology, and sexuality—examining them all through the paradigm of the cap worn by Shaker sisters. Geographer

and musician Carol Medicott followed with a very interesting lecture titled “Zion’s Travelers: Traveling to the Shaker West.” Medicott’s talk recounted the travels of Shakers over the Erie Canal and other routes as they journeyed between communities. Her talk was punctuated by performances of songs documented to have been sung by the Shakers on these trips.

Saturday, the last full day of Seminar, saw the group assemble a bit earlier for a bus trip to the former Shaker site at Sodus Bay, New York. Griff Mangan, who now owns the property, welcomed the Seminar to tour the wonderful Dwelling House which was constructed ca. 1833. Seminar attendees were thrilled to see the meeting room on the top floor of the building with its curved ceiling—so reminiscent of the ceiling of the 1824 Meetinghouse at Mount Lebanon, New York. Cheri Roloson, who runs the Cracker Box Palace Animal Shelter on the site, also warmly welcomed the Seminar and assisted in showing us around the property. Following a boxed lunch, Walter Brumm delivered his lecture “Putting Sodus Shaker Village on the Map.” Walter made use of an astonishing number of early nineteenth century manuscript plat maps of the area around Sodus Bay to demonstrate how the Shakers reused certain existing buildings and infrastructure when establishing their community there.

The Seminar wrapped up on Sunday morning with two final lectures. Shaker scholar Roben Campbell demonstrated her impressive grasp of primary source materials relating to the Harvard community with her talk “The Story of Harvard Shaker Sister Susan Channel (1809–1880).” Roben’s talk examined the ways in which the core membership of the Harvard Church Family was affected by the decisions of the Mount Lebanon Central Ministry, particularly Sister Susan Channel. Noted Shaker scholar and ever-popular presenter Steve Paterwic put an exclamation mark at the end of our program with his talk “Mount Lebanon’s Gifts to the Western New York Shakers.” This talk examined the way in which Mount Lebanon’s Central Ministry guided and assisted the Shakers at Sodus Bay and Groveland throughout the life of those communities. After Steve’s talk we gathered for a last lunch, sang “Farewell Dear Crossbearers,” and looked ahead to 2009’s Seminar, which will be held at Enfield and Canterbury, New Hampshire.

Thanks to everyone who came, to all of our speakers, and to our hosts at The Oneida Community Mansion House, Alasa Farms and Cracker Box Palace, and Hamilton College!