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HARRISON, OHIO:

Celebrating 200 Years of White Water Shaker Village 1823-2023

Though unknown to many area residents, the remains of a once-thriving communal religious community can still be found in Southwest Ohio. White Water Shaker Village, located on Oxford Road just outside of Harrison, Ohio, was founded in 1823 by early settlers in Hamilton County and Butler County. These settlers were part of a religious group formally known as the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, but commonly known as the Shakers, which prospered in Ohio in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They were called "Shakers" because of the ecstatic dancing during their worship services.

The buildings that still remain on Oxford Road are rich in religious, social, and architectural history. White Water Village is home to the only brick Shaker meeting house (church) in the United States and is the only intact Shaker village in Ohio. The brick meeting house, built in 1827, has a unique architectural design in which the second floor and attic are suspended by a truss and hanger system in the attic. This design enabled the Shakers to dance during their religious services on the first floor without the obstruction of columns.

History of the Village

Two hundred years ago, Shakers from Union Village in Lebanon, Ohio, came to preach at the request of families living near the Mt. Tabor Methodist Church in Morgan Township, Butler County. They soon found rich soil, abundant timber, and the flowing stream of the Dry Fork of the White Water River in Hamilton County's Crosby Township. They decided to establish a Shaker village there, which became known as White Water. Early converts donated their properties, thus enlarging White Water's holdings. The village grew to 1,128 acres in Hamilton County and 664 acres in Butler County.

For 93 years, White Water Shaker Village was a thriving center for the Shakers. They were known for their simple way of life, technical innovations, music, and hand-crafted furniture. They also believed in the importance of gender equality. At its height before the Civil War, there were 180 Shakers living at the White Water Village.

After the Civil War, the village's population declined. By 1915, with fewer than 10 Shakers left, the village closed, and the land was sold to three local farming families. Later, it was purchased by Great Parks of Hamilton County.

Friends of the White Water Shaker Village

In 2007, a nonprofit, Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. (FWWSV), leased eight acres and ten historic structures of the village. Since then, volunteers have worked diligently to open the village to the public. FWWSV has completed many projects,

including restoring all windows in the meeting house, building new modern restrooms, and installing a septic system. Current projects include renovations to the 1849 milk house and a volunteer painting initiative in the 1827 meeting house and 1832 dwelling.

During this 200th anniversary year, FWWSV is working to raise awareness of the Shaker village, to increase membership, and to raise funds for restoration work. Memberships and donations are important, as they provide the resources to preserve the great treasures in this village. You can help FWWSV continue its work to preserve, restore, and open the Shaker buildings to the public by becoming a FWWSV member. Visit the FWWSV website for more information about membership and about scheduling private tours, participating in corporate sponsorships, and signing up for volunteer opportunities.

Five events Celebrating the 200th Anniversary

- On Saturday, April 22, Friends of White Water Shaker Village will hold its Annual Gathering. The meeting will feature two speakers. One discussing the Shakers' use of spirits, including White Water's brewery, and the other speaking on the Shakers and the local community in the early 1800s. The event will also include lunch and a tour of the village. Advanced reservations are required for this event. Visit www.WhiteWaterVillage.org for more information.
- Open houses and guided tours of the village will take place on Sunday, May 28th; Sunday, September 24th; and Saturday, October 7th, from 2-5 pm. These events are free and open to the public.
- The 196th anniversary of the meeting house will be celebrated in December with a special candlelight event for members.