

# St. Maur's Priory: Benedictine link with the Shakers

By Jerry Long  
c.2024



Shaker Wash House constructed by the Shakers in 1854. Part of St. Maur's Priory & St. Mark's Priory 1949-1988. Picture taken by Jerry Long on 11 November 1980.



St. Mark's Priory / Visitors Welcome sign. Picture taken by Jerry Long on 11 November 1980.



St. Maur's / St. Mark's Priory chapel and administration building; built in 1958. Picture taken by Jerry Long on 11 November 1980.



St. Mark's Priory chapel & administration building, South Union, KY. Picture from The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky, Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 1995, p.64.



St. Mark's Monastery Chapel, 1974

St. Maur's Priory, a Benedictine monastery, at South Union, KY was founded in 1949 by monks from the St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota. The monks on 9 August 1949 purchased 50 acres, part of the historic South Union Shaker village that was active here from 1807 until it was closed in 1922. The village is now on the National Register of Historic Places. The purchase by the Benedictine monks included four Shaker buildings.

St. Maur's Priory was unique in that it was established as a bi-racial monastery. It was ahead of most institutions in its promotion of integration. In 1963 a Negro, Rev. Bernardine Patterson, O.S.B., was appointed prior (superior) of the monastery.

St. Maur's Priory served as a seminary for the Diocese of Owensboro during 1954-1965. The seminary opened on 9 September 1954 with an enrollment of nine students. It became an independent priory in 1963. In 1968 the monastery's members voted to divide the community and the majority of the members moved to Indianapolis, IN. A few of the community remained in South Union. Those remaining changed the name of the Priory to St. Mark's Priory.

In November 1971 St. Mark's Priory sold three acres to the non-profit organization Shakertown Revisited, Inc.; this included three of the historic Shaker buildings – Center House, preservative and wash house. The Center House, erected in 1824, is now the home to the Shaker Museum.

St. Mark's Priory continued until it was dissolved in February 1988. The Fathers of Mercy, from Cold Springs, NY, bought the remaining 47 acres of the St. Mark's property, including an original Shaker building that had served as a retreat house. The Fathers of Mercy, 806 Shaker Museum Road, continues to serve at the location.



**Park City Daily News, Bowling Green, KY, Thursday, 18 August 1949, p.1:**

Catholic Order  
Buys Portion  
Of Shakertown

Sale of 50 acres and several buildings in near-by Shakertown to the Order of St Benedict, Inc., was announced today by O. S. Bond of Louisville

The Roman Catholic order unofficially is reported to have paid \$60000 for the property, located on the Russellville road in Logan county about 15 miles southwest o here.

The site will be the location of the first Benedictine monastery in Kentucky. A boys' school is expected to be opened eventually. Candidates for the order also will be received there.

It was announced last April that an inter-racial monastery would be established in Kentucky where Negro and white members would "live in community with entirely equal rights." The announcement was made by the Rev Alcuin Deutsch, abbot of St John's, Collegeville, Minn., where the largest Benedictine monastery in the world is located.

The order purchased a 60-acre farm at St Denis in Graves county last spring and debated for a while whether to locate the monastery there or at Shakertown. Farm products from St Denis will be used by the monastery.

Several seminarians, brothers and priests already are on the grounds at Shakertown.

Bond said the four buildings included in the sale are more than 100 years old. They include approximately 100 rooms, he added.

Shakertown got its name as the result of being the site of a Shaker colony. The religious group which practiced communal living, founded the colony about 1801. A large group flourished there for many years.



**Auburn News, Auburn, KY, 30 April 1958, pp.1 & 2:**

**Now Major Seminary: St. Maur's Ordaining Seven**

SOUTH UNION – Almost ten years have elapsed since the Benedictine Fathers from St. Johns Abbey in Collegeville Minn, in an apostolic venture at historic Shakertown, near Bowling Green, founded their interracial monastery.

St Maur's, as their foundation was named, is this year completing its first four-year cycle as a major seminary, the only major seminary in Kentucky. Its ordination class consists of seven men, one of the smallest in the country .

Six members of the class will be priests in Owensboro, Louisville, Covington, Belleville, Ill., and Washington, D. C.

The Rev. Emilian Muschette O.S.B., the only Negro student in this first class, is one of the earliest Benedictine candidates to be ordained for priestly work at St Maur's. He is the first member of the community to receive his entire theological training at St Maur's.

The Seminary was opened for the first time on Sept 9, 1954, with an enrollment of only nine students.

The enrollment this year has grown to 25 men representing nine dioceses, together with four clerics from the St. Maur's Community.

In an address to the Monks at the opening of their Seminary, Bishop Francis Cotton of Owensboro said: "You Benedictines here at St. Maur's have bravely undertaken the most important and difficult functions of the Church in opening a theological seminary."

**Three Already Ordained**

This years ordination class marks the first complete cycle of studies. However, three Benedictines who completed their studies earlier have already been ordained for work at St. Maur's – Fathers Andre Brissett, Thomas O'Connor, a native of nearby Bowling Green, and Mario Shaw, the first Negro priest to be ordained for St. Maur's.

This first Benedictine foundation in Kentucky is still guided by the priest who first conceived the idea of such a religious establishment, Father Alexander Korte. O. S. B., first and present Prior of the community.

Upon the invitation of Bishop Cotton to found a religious community in his diocese four Benedictines first settled at Fancy Farm, Ky, in October, 1948. The following August the monks moved to the present site because of its more suitable country location and facilities.

The building, which now houses the diocesan seminarians, was once the main hub of the religious sect commonly known as the "Shakers."

In many ways the Shakers lived a monastic life. Then men and women lived in separate dormitories. They rose early, prayed together, held property in common and were under appointed superiors.

Even the Shaker motto “Hands to work and hearts to God” was similar to the ancient Benedictine summary of the monk’s life: “Worship and Work.”

However, when Father Alexander and his three fellow monks arrived at Shakertown for the first time, it had long since been vacated. Its last inhabitants had been flood victims in 1937.

#### First Mass in 1949

Holy Mass was celebrated for the first time at St. Maur’s on August 9, 1949 in a room which had once been a Shaker meeting room. This same room since that day has been the site of monastic professions (before the building was converted to the seminary) and also the conferral of the various minor and major orders on their pioneer classes of the Seminary.

Because of the increasing number in the monastic community and record number of seminarians this year the Seminary wants to build a larger permanent Chapel in which to carry out the liturgical functions.

At the present time the Benedictines are endeavoring to raise enough funds to begin the first new building at old Shakertown since 1854.

Those to be ordained this, year and their diocese are:

Leonard L. Alvey and James F. Wathen (Owensboro), Leonard F. Hurley, (Washington, D. C.), Henry L. Mitchell (Louisville), Jerome W. Feldman (Belleville, Ill.) and Paul A. Wolfzorn (Covington).



In center Mitchell C. Long, Sr. (1925-1995), with sons, Mitchell C. Long, Jr. (on left) & Jerry Long. During 1962-1964 Mitchell, Jr. was a student at St. Maur’s Priory. Standing

in front of Shaker building erected in 1854. Picture was made by Mabel J. Long.



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# ST. MAUR'S

## Bulletin

This Bulletin is Published by the Benedictines of  
St. Maur's Priory, South Union, Kentucky

May the spirit of Christmas bring you  
Joy and Happiness throughout the New  
Year.

### PRIOR'S LETTER

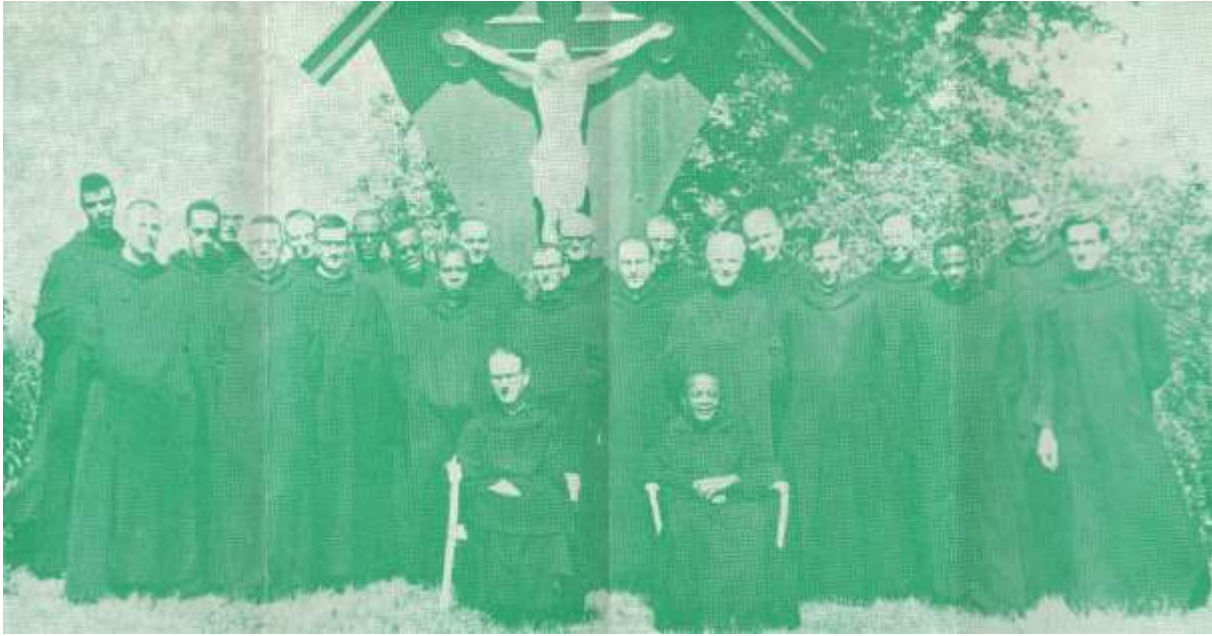
Dear Friends of St. Maur's:

This Christmas edition of the Bulletin must serve as our best, albeit modest, attempt to be with you during this festive season. You may wish to share your many spiritual and material blessings with us and other of your friends in the true spirit of Christmas's central Figure. Nonetheless, we sincerely urge you not to overlook the poor, homeless, or bereaved ones who are near to you, and help them to erase some of their possible bitterness toward the world—at least on this one day of Christmas. Our gala holiday celebrations will disquiet us if we ignore Christ's favorites.

I shall offer one of my three Christmas Masses for your intentions.

Sincerely yours in St. Benedict,

Father Prior



OUR FAMILY: Seated: Father Charles Henry, Prior, (L), Father Bernardino Patterson, Sub Prior (R). FRONT ROW: (Left to Right) \*Frater Paul Romfh, Father Harvey Shepherd, Prater Aaron Kraft, Father Emilian Musehette, Brother Denis Farrell, Frater Sarto Pennisi, Brother Novice Angelus Stancourt, Father Thomas O'Connor, Brother Joseph Alexander, Brother Anthony Streit. BACK ROW: Brother Lawrence Montgomery, Brother Michael Burgette, \*Prater Jude Krogal, Brother Novice Alcuin Rolfes, Father Ermin Bell, Brother Novice Howard Studivant, \*Prater Placid Persson, Brother Benedict Nordick, Brother Paul Lauer, Father Alexander Korte, Brother Julius Terfehr and Father Mario Shaw. Not pictured are: Father Waldemar Reese, Father Columba Halsey, Brother John Larner and Brother Novice Stephen Kencel. Marked with \* are visiting clerics from St. Leo's Abbey, St. Leo, Florida.



### Seminarians, Diocese of Owensboro, KY, 1963 to 1-30-1964

| Name                     | Class    | Seminary         | Parish               |
|--------------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| Asplund, Carl            | 3 Theol. | Theological Col. |                      |
| Aull, Wendall Raymond    | 4 High   | St. Thomas       | Knottsville          |
| Batusic, Michael         | 1 High   | St. Maur's       | St. John's           |
| Berschiel, Paul Llwellyn | 2 High   | St. Thomas       | St. Francis de Sales |
| Bishop, Lawrence Anthony | 2 High   | St. Mary's, Ky.  | Sts. Joseph & Paul   |
| Blair, Benedict George   | 2 High   | St. Mary's, Ky.  | Reed                 |
| Bouvier, Arthur Michael  | 3 Theol. | St. Bernard's    | Immaculate           |
| Braddock, Patrick        | 1 High   | St. Maur's       | Sturgis              |
| Bumm, Robert Lee         | 1 High   | St. Thomas       | O. L. Lourdes        |
| Calhoun, Donald Anthony  | 1 High   | St. Maur's       | Curdsville           |
| Calhoun, Thomas Paul     | 2 High   | St. Maur's       | Curdsville           |
| Carrico, Michael         | 1 High   | St. Maur's       | Sts. Joseph & Paul   |

|                               |           |                 |                     |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Casper, Robert James          | 2 Col.    | St. Mary's, Ky. | St. Thomas More     |
| Cheshire, Mark                | 1 High    | St. Maur's      | Sts. Joseph & Paul  |
| Clark, James Gerlald [quit]   | 1 High    | St. Maur's      | Precious Blood      |
| Clemons, Thomas Delma         | 2 Theol.  | St. Maur's      | Wax                 |
| Cole, Artis Ray               | 2 High    | St. Mary's, Ky. | Marion              |
| Curtsinger, Delbert Anthony   | 1 High    | St. Mary's, Ky. | Fancy Farm          |
| Duffy, James T.               | 3 High    | St. Thomas      | Immaculate          |
| Dunlany, William Patrick      | 2 High    | St. Thomas      | Uniontown           |
| Dunn, Louis Stephen           | 1 Phl.    | St. Mary's, Ky. | Princeton           |
| Dunn, Thomas. Michael         | 2 High    | St. Thomas      | Princeotn           |
| Field, Phillip Slack          | 3 Theol.  | St. Maur's      | Precious Blood      |
| Freels, Joseph Earl           | 2 High    | St. Maur's      | Stanley             |
| Fulkerson, Daniel Wayne       | 1 High    | St. Mary's, Ky. | Cathedral           |
| Garlich, Rev. Mr. Robert Luke | 4 Theot.  | St. Maur's      | Melbourne, Ky.      |
| Gibson, Kenneth Raymond       | 1 Phl.    | St. Mary's, Ky. | Uniontown, Ky.      |
| Goetz, William Lawrence       | 3 High    | St. Mary's      | Rome                |
| Grant, David Allen            | 3 High    | St. Mary's      | Wax                 |
| Hagan, James Edward           | 3 High    | St. Mary's      | Henderson           |
| Hagan, Joseph Anthony         | 1 High    | St. Mary's      | Henderson,          |
| Hancock, Robert               | 2 Phl.    | St. Meinrad     | Waverly             |
| Hancock, William Patrick      | 2 College | St. Thomas      | Waverly             |
| Hayden, Bernard LeRoy         | 1 College | St. Thomas      | Immaculate          |
| Hayden, Donald Anthony [quit] | 3 High    | St. Thomas      | Browns Valley       |
| Hayden, James Francis         | 1 High    | St. Mary's      | Bowling Green       |
| Henderson, William M.         | 2 High    | St. Maur's      | St. Pius Tenth      |
| Higdon, Edward                | 3 High    | St. Maur's      | St. Pius Tenth      |
| Howard, Donald Edward         | 2 College | St. Thomas      | Whitesville         |
| Howard, Donald Francis        | 3 Theol.  | St. Meinrad     | Whitesville         |
| Howard, Melvin David          | 1 High    | St. Thomas      | Whitesville,        |
| Jennings, Rollie Carlos       | 1 High    | St. Maur's      | St. Thomas More     |
| Johnson, David Austin, Jr.    | 3 High    | St. Maur's      | Whitesville         |
| Johnson, David Michael        | Spec.     | St. Mary's      | Bowling Green       |
| Keller, Phillip Ray           | 4 High    | St. Mary's      | Stanley             |
| Lindemann, David Joseph       | 2 Phl.    | St. Mary's      | Cathedral           |
| Lindlee, James Ryan           | 1 High    | St. Maur's      | Sturgis             |
| Long, Joseph Mitchell         | 2 High    | St. Maur's      | Our Lady of Lourdes |
| Luckett, Joseph Currie        | 2 High    | St. Mary's      | Russellville        |
| Luther, Rev. Mr. Francis M.   | 4 Theol   | St. Maur's      | Mayfield            |
| McCarty, Donald Earl          | 1 High    | St. Maur's      | St. Raphael         |
| Mattingly, Ronald Nathan      | 2 Phl.    | St. Mary's      | Morganfield         |
| Meister, Frederic Joseph      | 3 High    | St. Meinrad     | Greenville          |
| Mills, Jerome Hite            | 1 Phl.    | St. Mary's      | Morganfield         |
| Mitchell, Joseph Stephen      | 2 High    | St. Thomas      | Sts. Joseph & Paul  |
| Mitchell, Robert Franklin     | 4 High    | St. Mary's      | Reed                |
| Montgomery, John Raymond      | 2 High    | St. Thomas      | Knottsville         |
| Morton, Claude Porter         | 3 High    | St. Thomas      | Cathedral           |



|                                 |           |             |                        |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-------------|------------------------|
| Mulligan, William Dennis        | 1 High    | St. Maur's  | Browns Valley          |
| Mullican, Michael Alien         | 1 High    | St. Meinrad | Stanley                |
| Nass, Thomas Joseph             | 4 High    | St. Mary's  | Sturgis                |
| O'Bryan, David Eugène           | 1 High    | St. Thomas  | Blessed Mother         |
| O'Bryan, Herman Joseph          | 2 College | St. Thomas  | Blessed Mother         |
| OBryan, Larry Eugene            | 2 High    | St. Mary's  | St. Lawrence           |
| O'Neill, John Francis           | 2 High    | St. Mary's  | St. Charles            |
| Onley, Danieèl F.               | 2 College | St. Thomas  | Immaculate             |
| Pirtle, James Stephen           | 1 High    | St. Mary's  | Cathedral              |
| Ralph, Charles Earl             | 1 High    | St. Maur's  | Cathedral              |
| Rhodes, Joseph Craig            | 2 High    | St. Maur's  | Earlington             |
| Riney, William Jerry            | 1 High    | St. Mary's  | St. Aiphonsus          |
| Roberts, Gary Leonard           | 3 High    | St. Maur'S  | Knottsville            |
| Rogers, Francis J.              | 1 High    | St. Maur's  | Hopkinsville           |
| Ross, Edward Anthony            | 2 High    | St. Thomas  | Mayfield               |
| Schrecker, James                | 1 High    | St. Meinrad | Stanley                |
| Sims, Alan Douglas              | 1 College | St. Thomas  | St. Pius Tenth         |
| Taliaferro, Ernest Elbert, Jr., | 2 High    | St. Thomas  | Immaculate             |
| Thomas, Philip Irvino           | 2 Phl.    | St. Mary's  | Henderson              |
| Thompson, Phillip Leo           | 3 High    | St. Mary's  | Rome                   |
| Thompson, Samuel Hald           | 2 High    | St. Mary's  | Sy. Thomas More        |
| Vaughn, John                    | 2 High    | St. Mary's  | St. Thomas More        |
| Wade, Charles Layton            | Spec.     | St. Mary's  | Princeton              |
| Wayne, Charles David            | 1 High    | St. Thomas  | Our Lady of Lourdes    |
| White, Carroll                  | 1 Theol.  | St. Mary's  | Peonia                 |
| Willett, Joseph Robert          | 2 Phl.    | St. Mary's  | Fancy Farm             |
| Woodall, Clarence Allen         | 1 High    | St. Thomas  | Princeton              |
| Yopp, George Michael            | 4 High    | St. Mary's  | St. Francis de Sales   |
| Jones, Edward Anthony, 2-1-64   | Special   | Loyola      | St. Pius Tenth, O'Bro. |

Summary:

| Class     | Seminary             | Parish |                     |   |                     |
|-----------|----------------------|--------|---------------------|---|---------------------|
| 4 Theol.  | 2 Loyola             | 1      | Cathedral           | 5 | Morganfield 2       |
| 3 Theol.  | 3 St. Bernard        | 1      | Blessed Mother      | 2 | Sturgis 2           |
| 2 Theol.  | 1 St. Meinrad, minor | 3      | Immaculate          | 5 | Paducah, St.F. 2    |
| 1 Theol.  | 0 St. Meinrad, major | 2      | Our Lady of Lourdes | 3 | Paducah, St. T.M. 4 |
|           |                      | 20     | Sts. Joseph & Paul  | 5 | Peonia 1            |
| 2 Phl.    | 6 St. Maur, Theol.   | 5      | St. Pius 10th       | 4 | Wax 2               |
|           |                      |        | Precious Blood      | 2 | Reed 2              |
| 1 Phl.    | 3 St. Mary's, Ky.    | 32     | Bowling Green       | 2 | Rome 2              |
|           |                      | 20     | Central City        | 1 | Russelivilie 1      |
| 2 College | 5 Theol. College     | 1      | Curdsville          | 2 | St. John's 1        |
| 1 College | 2                    | —      | St. Raphael         | 1 | St. Joseph 1        |
|           |                      | 85     | Earlington          | 1 | Stanley 4           |
| Special   | 3                    |        | Princeton           | 4 | Uniontown 2         |
|           |                      |        | Fancy Farm          | 2 | Waverly 2           |
| 4 High    | 5                    |        | St. Charles         | 1 | Whitesville 4       |

|        |    |              |   |           |    |
|--------|----|--------------|---|-----------|----|
| 3 High | 12 | Henderson    | 3 | Melbourne | 1  |
| 2 High | 18 | Marion       | 1 | ?         | 1  |
| 1 High | 25 | Hopkinsville | 1 |           |    |
|        | —  | Knottsville  | 3 | Total     | —  |
|        | 85 | St. Lawrence | 1 |           | 85 |
|        |    | Mayfield     | 2 |           |    |

Seminary addresses:

Loyola University, Pre-Seminary Latin Course, Chicago, 26, Ill.

St. Bernard Seminary, 2260 Lake Avenue, Rochester, N.Y.

St. Mary's College, St. Mary, Ky.

St. Maur's Seminary, South Union, Ky.

St. Meinrad Seminary, St. Meinrad, Ind.

St. Thomas Seminary, 7101 Brownsboro Road, Louisville, Ky.

Theological Cllege, 401 Michigan Ave., N.E., Washington, 17, D.C.



**The Catholic Transcript, Vol. LXVII, No. 47, Hartford, CT, 18 March 1965, p.6:**

#### Congress Prayer By Negro Priest

Washington—(NC)— Father Bernardine Patterson, O.S.B., first Negro to head a Benedictine monastery in this country, opened a session of the House of Representatives here with prayer.

Father Patterson is prior of the interracial St. Maur's Priory in South Union, Ky., which is considering moving to Indianapolis, Ind. The 40-year-old Benedictine is a cousin of Floyd Patterson, former heavyweight boxing champion, and was a top ranked amateur boxer before he went to the seminary.



St. Maur's / St. Mark's Priory

Letter dated 20 December 1967 to "the Long Family", 2937 Aldersgate, Owensboro, KY 42301 from Rev. Harvey Shepherd, OSB, 4615 N. Michigan Road, Indianapolis, IN 46208:

SAINT MAUR'S SEMINARY  
4615 N. Michigan Road  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46208

Dear

It is my great joy to tell you that our Seminary of South Union, Kentucky has been re-located in the Indianapolis area, after months and months of waiting and great expectation of building a new seminary for a better future.

At present only eight monks from Kentucky are living in Indianapolis. The rest are still at our original foundation. We are hopeful that all the monks will be together next year, when our housing problem will be solved.

After 19 years in Kentucky, I found moving away a great hardship....leaving behind the busy Hy-68, the Blue Grass, the old Shaker Buildings, and all the loyal and beloved friends. I am happy and grateful for all the pleasant years spent in Logan county.

Father Thomas O'Connor and I drove to Indiana on July 5, and we found the people here very much like those of sunny Kentucky..... kind and friendly.

We found the re-location of the Seminary a challenge and, many of us speak of it, in the words of our late President Kennedy as a "new frontier".

We beg your prayers for the success of our project. And when you are in the area, please stop in to see us.

Devotedly in Christ,

Harvey Shepherd, O.S.B.

*Did you know - our  
Seminary moved to  
Indiana -*



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 10 September 1970, p.3A:

## **Logan County Shaker Site Will Be Offered For Sale**

AUBURN, Ky. – Many Logan Countians are hoping for a windfall or some lucky break before December.

The South Union Shaker Colony, presented [sic] owned by the St. Maur's Monastery, will be sold by that time.

Most of the Benedictines have moved to Indianapolis where land has been donated to the Order. Only nine brothers remain at the South Union Community.

Logan Countians who are interested in seeing the community preserved – and most all of them are – would like to see this colony become a major tourist attraction.

Mrs. Curry Hall, director of the Shaker Museum which is currently located on the Shaker Sugar Maple Farm, thinks it would be ideal for the museum to be moved onto the community itself.

The 17 ½ acre tract that will be sold contains three of the original Shaker buildings – the center house, the preservatory and the old Shaker wash house.

The old brick center house, built in 1824, is the large dwelling that housed the church family. Features include built-in wall cupboards, hallway arches and separate stairs, one for men, the other for women.

The dairy or preservatory was built before 1852 and was used by the Shakers for seed-drying, hat-making and blacksmithing.

The wash house, built in 1854, was used not only for washing and drying but also by the women for weaving and straw bonnet making.

All buildings are intact and in good condition.

In terms of communal living few American communities have been as successful as the South Union Shaker Colony.

The society was gathered in 1807, reached a membership of 349 in 1827, and closed in 1922, the last of the six western societies to disband.

The South Union Shakers built a neat and attractive village. They planted orchards, raised thoroughbred cattle, established mills, entered into silk culture and did a large scale seed business. Their goods were sold down the river as far as New Orleans.

Not only were the Shakers highly inventive themselves but they also adopted whatever inventions of "the world" they thought would help them economically. The South Union members were among the first in Logan County to have a gasoline pump, corn shellers, lightning rods and sewing machines. In the early 1900's they installed bathrooms and telephones.

Water had been run into the kitchens in the 1830's. The society's automobile was one of the first in the area.

Thus it is with a certain amount of pride that folks around Auburn and throughout Logan County, join for a week of festivities each July to celebrate the annual Auburn Shaker Festival.

It is this community pride and the desire to insure the future of the Shaker community that causes the people to unite with the hope that somehow the buildings and grounds may remain together as a monument to the believers who built them.



**This Far By Faith: The Story of Catholicity in Western Kentucky,  
A Commemorative Edition Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the  
Diocese of Owensboro, (1937-1987), Judy Hayden (editor), 1987, pp.60-61:**

In 1954 the diocese gained the presence of another monastic community when the bishop invited the monks of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, to establish an interracial community of monks in western Kentucky.

Father Alexander Korte, O.S.B. was the first to come and made his temporary home at St. Denis, a mission of Fancy Farm. Before long, three more Benedictine monks came from St. John's Abbey. The interracial aspect took place as two were black and two were white. Shortly afterwards, several postulants arrived to join the community.

In 1949 sixty acres of "Shakertown" at South Union came up for sale. St. John's purchased the land, and in August the monks moved to their new home in Logan County; they called it "St. Maur's Priory."

In 1954, with help from Bishop Cotton, the monks began a seminary and eventually opened a small high school for their postulants; it was discontinued in 1965, however. In 1968, the Priory and Seminary were transferred to Indianapolis.

From the beginning of the foundation, the monks engaged themselves in the apostolic work of assisting the clergy of the diocese and offered retreats for the laity. When the others left in 1968, a group of monks remained in Logan County and adopted "St. Mark's" as their title. For a while, they ran a seminary for delayed vocations, but it was discontinued in 1984.

In October 1987, the diocese was saddened by the news that St. Mark's would soon be closing its doors due to declining membership. The Benedictines will transfer to other monasteries of their cloister. Our local church has been enriched by their presence among us for over 30 years.



**The Logan Leader, Russellville, KY, Monday, 13 April 1987, p.2:**

Founder, former prior of St. Mark's, dies

By Robyn Libs

The Rev Alexander Bartholomew Korte, 81, was buried Friday at St Mark's Priory cemetery at South Union. Father Alexander, who was one of the founders and a former prior at St Mark's died Tuesday evening at the Bowling Green Medical Center.

A native of Farming Minn., he was the eldest of 10 children in his German Catholic family. His parents were the late Mr. and Mrs. Herman Korte He joined the Benedictine order in 1927 at St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minn. He obtained a doctor of theology degree in Salzburg, Austria, and was ordained in 1932.

Before coming to South Union he taught theology at St John's. In 1947 the abbot at St. John's decided it was time to start a "deliberately" interracial monastery and chose Fancy arm as a location. Father Alexander stayed there until 1949 when he and the Rev. Harvey Shepherd came to South Union and established St. Maur's.

According to accounts written by Father Alexander, St John's purchased the Shaker buildings and 60 acres for \$65000 from a Louisville millionaire, Oscar S. Bond.

For five years, the community was devoted to becoming self-sufficient, and in 1954 they decided to start a four-year seminary in the Shaker Center House

The present monastery was completed in 1955. By 1963 the priory was independent, no longer tied to the motherhouse, St John's.

According to the Rev. Phillip Waters, appointed superior of the priory now, the seminary thrived until the late '60s when unrest was rampant. Blacks at the seminary wanted to move to a big-city climate.

Father Alexander was not pleased with the proposed move and for two years he taught and was chaplain at St Mary's Convent in Nauvoo, ILL. He returned to St. Maur's in 1967, but on Sept. 14 of that year the seminary closed and most of the students and teachers moved to Indianapolis. Father Alexander stayed at South Union with Prior Bernardine.

In 1968 the Indianapolis Seminary took on the name St .Maur's. The priory at South Union became St Mark's, and Father Alexander became prior.

In 1973 the seminary was again opened but according to Father Alexander's writings the new seminary was for elderly men studying the priesthood. It operated until 1984.

Father Alexander continued teaching until 1983 when he quit because of failing health. The priory is now used as a retreat center with the 12 brothers in residence making the place self-supporting.

Father Waters said for most of his 81 years Father Alexander "was a vigorous man."

Brothers at the priory refer to him as "kind enthusiastic and positive." One brother said he was an inspiration to all and he would be missed. Brother Basil who was very close to Father Alexander in the last few years said, "He was a gentle man." Basil who is the infirmarian took care of Father Alexander while he was ill.

Even with his ill health, Father Alexander celebrated mass by himself until a year ago, and was also on the list to wash dishes according to Father Waters.

Father Alexander is survived by five brothers, Otto, Jack, Joseph, Edward and Lawrence Korte, all of Minnesota; and four sisters. Mrs. Magdalen Bates, Mrs. Bertha Bridman, Mrs. Marie Brinkman and Mrs. Lorraine Burggraff, all of Minnesota.

Father Alexander's contribution to the priory will not be forgotten, and his memory remain when people see the tree given by a neighbor which was planted next to his grave.



**The News-Democrat, Russellville, KY, Thursday, 12 November 1987, p.1B:**

Monks at St. Mark's taking one day at a time

By Robyn Libs

It's life as usual at St Mark's Priory in South Union, even though the Monks know that by March they will all be calling someplace else home. The welcome mat still extends to visitors and candidates thinking of joining the monks of St .Benedicts.

The closing of the priory is not because of financial problems, as some have speculated but because of the declining number of people dedicating themselves to this way of life, according to Brother Basil Kirsch. Kirsch, who is one of the few young monks at St. Mark's, expected to spend the rest of his days here.

The closing of the priory was a surprise to all of the monks. Prior Thomas O'Connor says St. Mark's is the only Benedictine priory closing right now, but he expects more to close in the

future. "Times are bad for vocations," he says and recalls the writings of an old Shaker brother who said, "This is too slow of a way to get to heaven."

St. Marks lacked the young membership it needed to continue. Of the 12 members in the community, only four are under the age of 60. O'Connor speculates that the priory could have gone on for another five years, "but a few more of us would have died by then" he says.

This year one of the long-standing members of the community — The Rev Alexander Bartholomew Korte — died at the age of 81. Father Alexander as he was called was one of the founders and former prior of St. Mark's. He is one of three buried in the priory's cemetery.

Some outsiders see the closing of the priory as another death. O'Connor says "We have been getting letters of condolence from people of various religions especially local non-Catholics." Just as death must be accepted so is the closing of the priory.

Spiritually death means new life and the closing of the priory means new life for the monks here. During October they visited various Benedictine monasteries across the United States to consider where they might move, Kirsch says, "The communities we have visited have been most warm in their welcome." He is considering going to a community in South Dakota.

The move won't take place until the spring so until then life is like it always has been, "one day at a time."

The day begins at 6 a.m. with prayers at 6:20 a.m. and then breakfast. From 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. there are- Lectio Divina, or spiritual readings, for the monks on their own.

From 8:30 to 11 a.m. it is time for the chores which include raking leaves, cleaning house or office work. Until recently there was a large cattle herd to tend. Kirsch says they didn't want to winter the cattle knowing they would have to be sold in the spring. In the early fall there is also an apple orchard to care for. The monks made a lot of apple cider this fall which sold as quickly as it was made.

At 11:30 a.m. it's time for the Eucharist mass. The public is welcome and there are several regulars who come each day. After mass is lunch, for which visitors are also welcome. And from 2 to 4 p.m. is afternoon work.

Until March 20, 1976, work included taking care of a large dairy herd. The milk was sold commercially. Kirsch remembers them as a "beautiful brown Swiss" herd. That day, however a tornado "raised" the roof on the barn.

At 5:30 p.m. each day there are vespers. Then it's time for supper. From 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. is community recreation.

The day ends with Compline or night prayers. Four times a day the monks are in the chapel. In between chapel and chores though they spend time with the many people who come through their doors. O'Connor says there have probably been over 300 candidates, people thinking of becoming monks who have come to St. Mark's staying anywhere from a month to a year.

St. Mark's, St. Maur's then, was begun in August 1949 with two brothers and six prospective candidates.

They settled in the Shaker Centre House and prepared the Wash House for residency. In 1954 a small seminary was opened and in 1958 the current monastery building was completed. The Wash House was then used as a high school. In 1963 St. Maur's became independent and it was decided the priory should be moved to Indianapolis. There were, however, a few monks who remained in South Union and chose the name of St. Mark's for the priory. They established a small seminary which trained belated vocations for the priesthood. It was forced to close in 1984 because of declining enrollment and increased cost.

The monks continued their daily life at that time just as they are now by helping out at local parishes and developing lay spirituality with retreat programs.

Members of the present community include: Prior O'Connor, Brothers, Eric Haynes, Juan Diego Kryzanas, John Brunschwiler, Kirsch, Paul Lauer and Thomas Whitaker, and fathers Augustine Ludwig, Benedict Nordick, Mauro Ventura, Jose-Ramon Mascareno and Francis Dos Remedios.

The property and buildings of the priory are being sold privately. O'Connor says they are hoping that another religious community will settle here. Kirsch says there are so many people in the area that have come to rely on St. Mark's for their spiritual needs, he hopes another Catholic organization comes in and provides for those needs.

If another religious community does purchase the priory, O'Connor says it will be sold "lock, stock and barrel," including the grounds, buildings, books and belongings. This will be undecided though until the monks find out who will be taking over St. Mark's.



**The Western Kentucky Catholic, Official Newspaper of the  
Diocese of Owensboro, Owensboro, KY, February 1988, p.5:**

**St. Mark's Benedictines To Close South Union Priory**

By Mel Howard

"There isn't a person with whom we come into contact that isn't essential to our lives. There is a purpose or that person would not be a part of our lives."

"Love is a free response of the heart to goodness."

"Glory to the Father and to the Son and to their Holy Spirit, as it was before, so now, and forevermore. Amen."

These statements were pronounced by monks at St. Mark's Priory near South Union in Logan County January 5. The monastery was having an annual retreat led by Father Gerard Kirsch, O.S.B. who said the first statement above in a morning conference which dealt with caring for the persons met in a day and with the future work of St. Mark's Monastery which will close near the middle of February. The Fathers of Mercy from Cold Springs, New York bought the 47-acre property with its original Shaker building used for a retreat house.

I went to St. Mark's Priory to visit with the monks there. As I arrived, a black dog got up from a warm bed to greet me. Though very large, the dog, Hildebrand, was hospitable and accompanied me later in the day as I took pictures. Brandy, as the monks call him, is a member of the community of St. Mark's and shows no particular favoritism to any single person but treats all humans with good natured care. Brandy has been taught by some masters at St. Mark's.

Though about to go separate ways to other monasteries, the ten monks who were at St. Mark's January 5 still smiled a lot and did their daily work with good spirit. Father Francis dos Remedios, O.S.B. gave the homily at the midday mass. He said the second statement above. He also said that a Christian practices being like God by loving. A person can only be happy when loving, he said. People can never truly love God unless they see Him in neighbors, Father Francis said.

In my short visit with the monks at St. Marks, I met most of them. Maybe it was because they were making a retreat, but an atmosphere of caring about what one another was doing or



needing filled the priory. I felt it in every room, even in the attic of the 1854 building used for a retreat house. There are little signs of men's love and care for one another throughout the priory. These men are not just making news in South Union, they are Good News as they practice being like God every day.

The Fathers of Mercy are bound to feel welcome and loved when they meet Brandy and when they live in the same rooms and halls as did the Benedictine Monks who gave themselves in love these past 39 years. The monks came to St. Mark's in 1948 under the leadership of Father Alexander Korte, OSB, the founder. Three priests in our own diocese were trained in their seminary for late vocations: Fathers Clarence Hite, Charles Wolford, and Joseph Bomensatt.

These three priests, our Bishop John McRaith, and other priests from the Owensboro diocese will visit St. Mark's on Feb. 16 for a 10:30 mass followed by a noon meal with the monks. The diocese will say goodbye to St. Mark's, thanking them for their spirit, their work, their prayer, both now and in the future.

The third statement which started this article is the familiar Glory Be worded a little differently as the monks say it. Like the other two statements, this one too describes the way of life for the monks at St. Mark's. This way of life carries on the best of the activities of the past and adapts them to the present day needs of the Church. Their monastery will be missed in our diocese, as will their seminary for the belated vocations to the priesthood, their weekend retreats for lay people, and their meetings with secular oblates. Many diocesan priests will have to look for other priests to give weekend assistance in parishes, a work which the Benedictines shared since 1948. The leaving of these Benedictines from the Owensboro diocese leaves an emptiness, not only in the hearts of those priests and lay people who shared their prayer and life but also in the hearts of many people who write to the monks and pray with them daily in their homes.

The old Shakers who constructed the buildings which St. Mark's Monastery used had a saying, "Hands to work and hearts to God." The ancient Benedictine Rule is "Worship and work." The place seemed made for the monks. But, like the Shakers before them, the Benedictines will leave a spirit and a legacy. Their presence in our diocese has enriched the hearts and spiritual lives of thousands of people.

When the last monk leaves in March, he will know that he leaves a place which will continue to be a home for priests, the Fathers of Mercy, and that he leaves a truly grateful diocesan church.



This Shaker building, erected in 1854, serves as a retreat house for the people who came to St. Marks for spiritual direction. The Fathers of Mercy will continue that use of this building. Photo by Mel Howard.



# The Shakers of South Union, KY

**The Kentucky Encyclopedia, John E. Kleber, editor,  
The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, 1992, pp.810-813:**

**Shaker Communities.** The Shakers, or Society of Believers, lived in two communities in Kentucky: Pleasant Hill near Harrodsburg and South Union near Bowling Green, founded in 1806 and 1807, respectively, when Shakers "gathered" on lands belonging to local converts.

American Shakerism had originated with a group of eighteenth century English Quakers, religious dissidents whose ecstatic manner of worship earned them the name Shaking Quakers, or Shakers. Their leader, a charismatic woman named Ann Lee, claimed to be in personal contact with the Divine. Her visions and teachings became the fundamental doctrines of the Shaker faith. At the core of the Shaker faith was a belief in the possibility of direct communication between Christ and his followers. The revelations that Lee claimed to have received inspired the Shaker doctrines of celibacy, perfectibility, and communal living.

The doctrine of celibacy was closely related to the Shaker belief in human perfectibility. Rejecting Calvinist notions of predestination and election, the Believers maintained that the confession of sin and the adoption of celibacy would allow participation in "the resurrection of life." According to the Shakers, the Millennium had already begun with the infusion of the Holy Spirit in Lee and her followers. To many of them, Lee appeared to represent the second coming of Christ, this time in female form.

Persecuted in England for their commitment to celibacy and pacifism and their liberal approach to Biblical interpretation, Lee and her small band of followers emigrated to America in 1774. By the 1830s the Shakers were flourishing in nineteen communities ranging from New England and New York to Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky.

Like the early Christians, the Believers saw common ownership of property, shared labor, and common worship as the purest expression of their faith. Set apart from the world, Shaker communities were efforts to live the "resurrected" life here on earth. Each family in the community consisted of fifty to one hundred and fifty men and women who lived together as brothers and sisters. Most of the nineteen societies in the United States were each made up of three or more families, which functioned relatively independently, much like a congregation. Each family had its own dwelling, workshops, barns, handicrafts, and industries.

Leadership of the family was entrusted to two elders and two eldersses, spiritual parents who guided and disciplined the younger members in the performance of shared obligations. These spiritual counsellors were assisted by family deacons and deaconesses, who managed the temporal activities of Believers, such as assigning Sisters and Brothers to their occupations and directing work in the various shops and industries. The economic affairs of each community were in the care of village trustees, who carried on commerce with the "world's people," and received all visitors and travelers. A central ministry watched over the affairs of the entire society, consulting as necessary with the elders and eldersses of the separate families and ensuring consistency in their policies and practices. The Millennial Laws, drawn up by the central ministry at Mount Lebanon, New York, codified the Shaker way of life in minute detail and resulted in a remarkable degree of uniformity in societies separated by long distances.

Visitors to Shaker communities were impressed by their orderliness, serenity, and simplicity. A typical Shaker day began early, at four o'clock on summer mornings and five in the winter. After kneeling for a moment of silent prayer, the Brothers went about their morning chores

while the Sisters moved through the dwelling closing windows, making beds, and putting the rooms in order. After the cows had been milked, the cattle fed, and the fires lit in the workshops, all assembled for breakfast, Brothers and Sisters sitting at separate tables. After a meal taken in monastic silence, Believers knelt again before departing for their labors.

As the Shakers returned to the tasks of the day, each member had his or her own lot, or calling. The Sisters prepared meals; did the washing, ironing, sewing, and weaving; tended to the poultry; and produced goods for sale, including cloth, canned fruits and vegetables, and medicinal herbs and seed packets. The Brethren worked about the farm, in the shops and mills. Strict rules and the watchful eye of community elders and eldersses enforced the separation of the sexes. Following the evening meal, the Shakers returned to their labors until they were called for evening worship, which often included dancing and singing. At the conclusion of such meetings, the family returned quietly to rest.

The main religious service began at one o'clock on Sunday afternoon, when all families in the village gathered at the meetinghouse. Marching in pairs, the Sisters behind the Brothers, they entered the church through separate doors. Once inside, the members were seated on long benches, with the two sexes facing each other. The presiding elder usually directed the worship service, which included singing and vigorous marching, dancing, and whirling. Occasionally, the worship service was opened to the public in the hope of converting new members. Rarely were such efforts successful, although it is recorded that many visitors witnessed these public displays of Shaker religious rituals.

As in early monastic communities, the work of the Believers was part of their worship, inseparable from their religious beliefs. The Shakers believed that God dwelt in the details of their work and the quality of their craftsmanship, and their devotion to excellence resulted in countless inventions and some of the greatest architecture in America. The Shakers won renown for their cloaks, oval boxes, and furniture. Shaker improvements in farming and industry were legion—from the introduction of new kinds of seeds to the invention of the common clothespin and circular saw.

A curve plotting the growth and decline of the Shakers would be almost symmetrical. The Society of Believers had about a thousand adherents in the year 1800. Fifty years later, in the decade before the Civil War, the Shakers reached their zenith with some 5,000 members. By the turn of the century, however, their ranks had dwindled to about a thousand again, as one society after another closed its doors, sold its lands. The causes of the decline of the Shakers are many. The waning of religious enthusiasm in the years after the Civil War, the growth of a more rational and scientific outlook among the general population, the industrial revolution, which made the artisan traditions of Shaker craftsmen obsolete—all contributed to the gradual extinction of the Shaker church.

**South Union.** The Shaker Village at South Union, Kentucky, about twelve miles southwest of Bowling Green in Logan County, "gathered" in 1807.

The village of South Union was the smaller of the two Kentucky communities, with about 350 members at its peak in the 1840s and 1850s, when South Union's communal landholdings grew to about 6,000 acres. More than two hundred buildings were constructed during the village's 115-year history. The magnificent forty-room Georgian-style Centre family dwelling house served as the administrative center for the four communal Shaker families in the immediate area. Other structures included the meetinghouse, barns, shops, mills, and the Victorian-style Shaker Tavern, constructed in 1869. The tavern, located on the rail line that passed near South Union, served as a

hotel and restaurant for the "world's people." The Shaker Tavern did a thriving business for more than 30 years.

Like the other Shaker communities, the Believers at South Union were versatile and exacting artisans. Their goods enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for excellence and were marketed across a wide territory. In addition to brooms and bonnets, the Shakers also sold garden seeds and award-winning preserves. From the sisters' looms came cheesecloth, wool, carpets, and chair tapes. Between 1825 and 1875 the society's row of mulberry trees produced silk for the kerchiefs and men's handkerchiefs that the women made. Goods brought by wagon to flatboats on the Barren River near Bowling Green made their way downriver to sites as far away as New Orleans. The South Union Shakers were also livestock breeders and by 1822 had purchased their first fine Durham bull, named Comet. Their merino sheep and Berkshire hogs were in great demand by neighboring farmers.

In other Shaker villages, blacks lived alongside whites in the various family houses, but at South Union the black family who were members lived separately, in a number of cabins at the west side of the community. Although complete equality between the races was a central tenet of the Shaker faith, the separate living quarters at South Union were probably deemed necessary in light of the pro-slavery views in the surrounding area.

Like the Shakers at Pleasant Hill, the South Union community was greatly affected by the events of the Civil War. They held onto their communal way of life until 1922, when the communal land, buildings, livestock, and farm equipment were sold. The few remaining members of the South Union community took up lives in mainstream America. Several of the original buildings have been restored by a nonprofit organization, Shaker-town at South Union, devoted to the preservation and interpretation of this remarkable chapter in Kentucky history. Part of the property is owned by the Benedictine fathers.

See Thomas D. Clark and Gerald F. Ham, *Pleasant Hill and Its Shakers* (Pleasant Hill, Ky., 1968); Julia Neal, *The Kentucky Shakers* (Lexington, Ky., 1977); Edward Demming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York 1953).

SUSAN MATARESE AND JAMES C. THOMAS



**Breckinridge News, Cloverport, KY, 20 January 1926, p.6:**

**SHAKER COLONY ENTIRELY GONE**

**An Unique People Who Lived In Kentucky Have Diminished Entirely**

Sixteen miles from Bowling Green on the Dixie Highway stands the old but once flourishing Shaker colony. A large tract of land on which are located dwellings, a large brick hotel a stone grist mill and various other buildings necessary to the habitation of a colony of people. This group of folks welcomed strangers into their midst where they might live as members of a large family. Putting their income be it great or small into a common fund for the upkeep of the colony. They were not allowed to marry and married persons on entering their colony must live as brother and sister.

Their mode of worship too, is quite strange. During the service they move in a uniform dance to the singing of hymns and march around the hall of worship, clapping their hands in regular time.

There are about twenty communities of these people in America. Perhaps 12 or 15 hundred in this Kentucky colony. They have been removed by death until only four remained, two men and two women. These were offered a home in an eastern colony or they might receive \$10,000 each and be free, this was done that the old colony and land might be sold. One man and woman went to the suggested colony, while the other couple took the money, married and went to live in a home of their own in this State.

The tract of land was then sold, to two parties, the larger tract of land consisting of 1,300 acres was purchased by Bond Brothers of Louisville, who expect to convert this into a modern stock farm with suitable stables, concrete silos and other equipment necessary for such a project.



**The Dawson Springs Progress, Dawson Springs, KY, 24 November 1960, p.2:**

**Kentucky Folklore: Shaker Museum**

By GORDON WILSON, Ph. D.  
Western Ky. State College

In the summer of 1959 Mr. and Mrs. Curry Hall, of Auburn, opened a Shaker Museum in a small church building on their property. Already it has attracted a great many visitors, for such a museum was long overdue. They have been surprised and pleased at the cooperation they have received and the encouragement offered by scholars and antiquarians.

The Shaker settlement at South Union, in Logan County, started about 1807 and continued down until 1922, when the members still living were getting quite old. The immense and valuable area that the sect owned was sold, and the few remaining members either went to one of the Eastern Shaker colonies or remained at Auburn. A large portion of the land was bought by Bond Brothers and made into a great farm; in recent years the Saint Maur Priory have purchased some of the old buildings and have erected a very beautiful modern school building. Also they have added many acres to their original purchase. This group have been very helpful in finding Shaker things and passing them on to the small museum. The sect itself have almost disappeared in America, having now only two locations; one in Maine and one in New Hampshire; only a dozen or so members survive. Some of the Eastern states are making Shaker museums, aided by these remaining members of what used to be a fairly large sect.

When a comprehensive history of Kentucky culture is written, considerable space will be given to the impact of the two great Shaker settlements : Pleasant Hill, in Mercer County, and South Union, in Logan County. Long before what would now be called scientific agriculture was practiced by even progressive farmers, the Shakers developed blooded livestock, raised high-class farm and garden seeds, and used modern methods of preserving and preparing food. The South Union colony became famous for its products. It became a custom to load a flatboat with distinctive products and go all the way down to New Orleans from Clarksville, Tennessee, the nearest river port to the colony. Long in advance, notices were sent ahead, and the boat became a traveling, floating store. Cured meats, jellies and preserves, farm and garden seeds it would take many a line just to mention what the flatboat had for sale. The brothers who had charge of this business would return from their long voyage by steamboat, sometimes with hundreds of dollars on their persons.

Cleanliness, orderliness, thrift, simple living, humbleness – these were some of the virtues of this strange sect, which survived the raw days of pioneer times, weathered even the cruel Civil

War, and maintained a stable government and quaint religious atmosphere down into our own times. The new museum illustrates everywhere the fine workmanship of the Shakers, for they were almost as self-sufficient as the original pioneers themselves. Wood work, shoemaking, weaving, food handling – they honored whatever they touched.

Some years ago I reviewed in this column Miss Julia Neal's BY THEIR FRUITS, a history of this colony at South Union. Miss Neal has continued to work on her studies and may some day bring out the Civil War diary of an eldress of their order, a day-by-day account of life by the side of the road where history went by, sometimes rather boisterously. The study by Miss Neal and the efforts of the Halls should awake in many of us a desire to know more phases of the culture of our area, its origin, its history, its gradual change.



**Historic Kentucky: Photographs and Text, J. Winston Coleman, Jr.,  
Henry Clay Press, Lexington, KY, 1968, p.77:**

**South Union Shaker Village**

LOGAN COUNTY — At the village of South Union, 13 miles east of Russellville on U. S. 68, stand several handsome brick buildings which once housed the Shaker colony. This religious sect, the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming, came to Logan County around 1807, acquired some 2,500 acres and established the village of "Shakertown" in 1810. Communal organization and celibacy were the cardinal beliefs of the members. In their comfortable, well-organized villages, the men and women lived apart. In 1827, South Union colony was in its heyday with 350 members. The number fluctuated from year to year and in 1874, membership had dropped to 230. The Shakers operated a tannery, hat factory, canning and preserving factory, made brooms and other household articles and wove silk from their silkworms. This three-story brick building was the main structure, erected around 1824-1825. In their services, the "Believers" had a peculiar form of dance or shuffling of the feet, hence the name "Shakers." There were five families at South Union—the Church family, the North family, the East family, the School family and the Black family. The latter group consisted of 30 Negroes. The last 30 years was a period of slow decline for South Union. Public worship was seldom held after 1900 and there were only 17 aged members in 1911. Lack of new recruits reduced the colony to a dozen members who, in 1922, sold the buildings and lands and moved to the Shaker settlement in Lebanon, New York. In 1949, the Benedictine Fathers purchased the brick buildings and 50 acres of ground on the north side of the highway and established a monastery known as St. Maurs Priory.



**The News-Democrat, Russellville, KY, 22 March 1990, pp.1 & 2:**

**As fundraiser for Centre House:  
'An Evening at Shakertown' set**

The Board of Directors of Shakertown Revisited Inc., this year has decided the number one priority in 1990 should be termite treatment and control for the Centre House. To benefit this project "An Evening at Shakertown" is being planned.

The Centre House at Shakertown has been a focal point to our area since 1822 – the year construction began on the four-story brick structure. Completed in 1833 the Georgian Colonial stands on a 28-inch foundation in grand style and scale with its 80 doors and 105 exterior windows.

Forty-two rooms contain literally miles of authentic Shaker peg rails, chair and hand rails molding, and almost an acre of white oak plank flooring.

After 168 years, the Centre House still reigns as the largest dwelling in the area. Today, it is the home of the Shaker Museum and can boast of having the largest collection of Kentucky and Ohio Shaker artifacts in the world.

The Centre House was built to accommodate the "families" of the Shaker belief. According to the museum's brochure the architecture of the Centre House is pure Shaker, its double room doors and staircases (180 steps) illustrating the Shaker practice of separating the sexes. Multi-drawer built-in cabinets (30 sets) and peg strips along the walls emphasize the Shaker principles of order and cleanliness. Transoms over the retiring room doors allow for good air circulation one of the essential rules for good health.

Then in 1922 the Centre House along with 4,000 acres was sold at public auction as the Shaker colony disbanded with the remaining two Shakers moving to a colony in the East. The Centre House was first owned by the late Oscar Bond of Louisville. Bond president of Bond Bros. Railroad Crossties purchased the property for the virgin timber. After removal of the trees he managed a successful farming operation, commuting from Louisville on weekends.

In 1949 the property was sold to St. Maur's Monastery.

During 1968 and 1969 plans were made to purchase the Centre House as a permanent museum for a small Shaker collection housed in Auburn. During the administration of Governor Louie B. Nunn the property was acquired for \$75,000 (half of this amount was raised locally) and the property was deeded to the State of Kentucky.



The Center House

Shakertown Revisited Inc., chartered in 1963, was granted a 99 year lease to the Centre House, 3.5 acres and the preservatory. The late Granville Clark was chairman during the acquisition and Russell Porter of Lewisburg was chairman during the renovation.

In 1971, the doors of Centre House were once more opened for the first of thousands of visitors. Tourists from all 50 states and approximately 30 foreign countries have visited the museum. Last year, in excess of 12,000 visitors viewed the life and times of the Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing – the Shakers.

The Shakers are known internationally for their elegant simplicity, harmony and functionalism in design, food and commerce. A few firsts attributed to the Shakers are such useful items as the common clothespin, the circular saw, the metal tipped pen, the revolving oven and the tilting chair.

The South Union Shakers developed a national reputation for the distribution of packaged garden seed, fruit preserves, and were also known for their handmade silk. Approximately 2,500 artifacts are catalogued and displayed – the smallest, the three-inch oval box by Eastern Shakers, and the largest a six-man sleigh from Canterbury Shaker Village N.H. Last year 10 Shaker items were donated, and from the profits of the Shaker Festival Picnic, a walnut cupboard, ca. 1841 was added to the collection.

#### Busy hands and big hearts

For years, the efforts of volunteers have sustained the museum. Mrs. Curry Hall, a board member of Auburn, remembers in 1960 the first Shaker collections being displayed in the old Christian Church Building located at Walnut and Viers streets in Auburn.

The organizers of this effort along with Mrs. Hall, were Hansford Scott, Granville Clark, Grover Corum, Bill Spencer and Virginia Hutchenson – representing the first Shaker organization. At the sale of 1922, Mrs. Hall's parents and her late husband's family acquired several Shaker pieces which have been donated to the museum. A Shaker enthusiast and museum benefactor, Mrs. Hall says, "What sparked my interest in the Shakers is living here on Sugar Maple farm." The land was part of the original Shaker properties.

In 1985 Tommy Hines was employed as a full-time director of the museum. His main duties include the care of the museum collection, administering daily activities, exhibits, special programs and events.

The present board of directors of Shakertown Revisited Inc., is chaired by Ray Clark. Other board members are Mrs. Hall, Sally Ann Strickler, and Mr. and Mrs. Bill Gaines of Auburn; Ruth Allender, Adrienne Dieball, Mark Iverson, and Dianne Watkins of Bowling Green; Joe Gran Clark, Paula Clark, Allison Dennis, Carol Dyche, Jay Joines, Bess Martin and Trent Spurlock of Russellville.

The board's responsibilities have expanded. Along with the museum, they include Shaker Tavern, the 1917 Shaker Store, now an antique mall and post office; and the Sisters Shop, an antique business formerly a tenant house. The three properties are located on a 15-acre tract.

Also the board oversees 72 acres known as the "Shaker Holy Ground" located near the Centre House, and they are trustees of the Bibb House located in Russellville.

The Shaker Museum is self-supporting and derives its income chiefly from membership of their "Friends" organization, museum admission and special events. Last year, due to emergency roof repair to the preservatory most of the operating fund was depleted.

This year in order to preserve and maintain the museum Director Tommy Hines reports, "Interior restoration has only just begun and we (the board) believe getting the termite problem



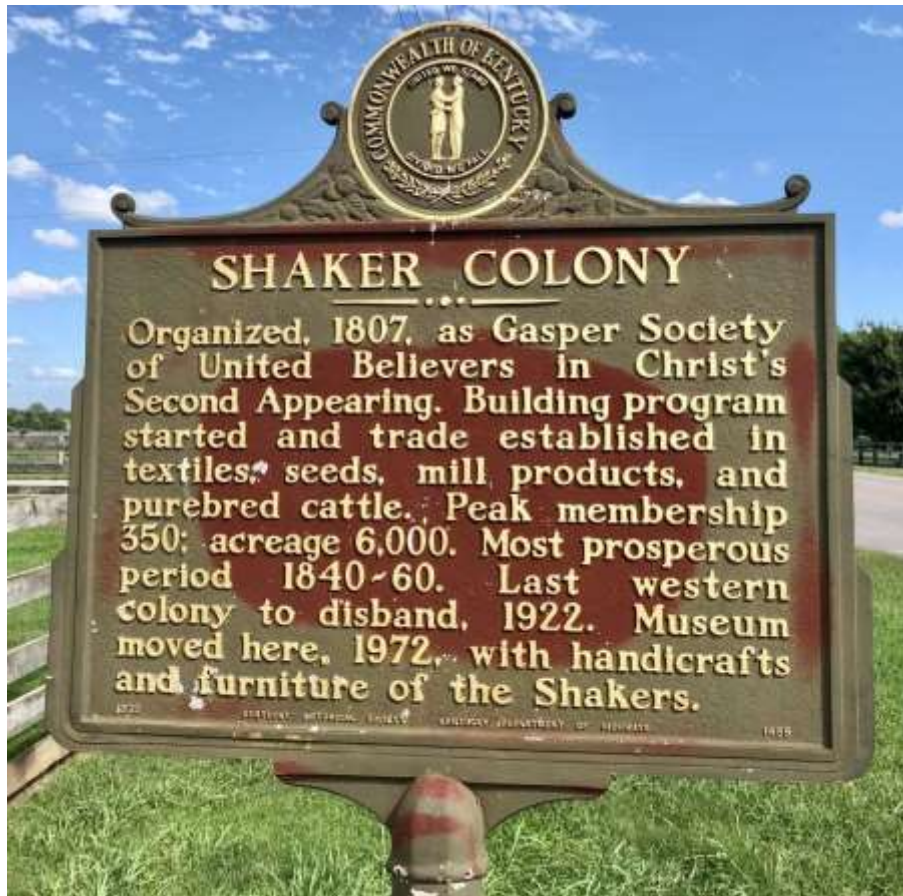
controlled is one of the first steps in stabilizing the Centre House interiors." He further says, "Our budget does not allow for large capital projects without help, and we are now at the point where something must be done."

To benefit this project "An Evening at Shakertown" is being planned for April 28, at the Shaker Museum. The black-tie (optional) gala will open the 1990 museum season; and in pure Shaker tradition is being called a "simply elegant and elegantly simple" affair.

Other monthly museum events scheduled for 1990 include: South Union Seminar in May; Shaker Festival June 15-17, 22-24, and July 1; Shakertown Teacher Workshop in July (especially designed for elementary teachers); Oval Box/Shaker Basket Workshop, Aug. 17-18; a Walking Tour and Luncheon on Sept. 15; Fall Candlelight Tour, Nov. 17; and Dec. 1-2 will feature Christmas at Shakertown.

The Shaker Museum will open April 1 on a daily basis from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. On Sunday the museum will be open from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Pat Basham and Lucy Franklin, publicity chairmen for "An Evening at Shakertown."



Historical marker erected in 1972 by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways. Marker is in front of the Shaker Museum on the Shaker Museum Road west of Shakertown Road (Kentucky Route 1466), on the right when traveling west.



Shaker Museum (Center House). Picture taken by Jerry Long on 11 November 1980. Kentucky Historical Highway marker in front of house.



Shaker Museum (Center House)



Shaker Museum (Center House)

In 1965 a non-profit organization called “Shakertown Revisited” was formed and established a Shaker Museum in Auburn. Support continued to grow beyond the region and tourist numbers increased each year. The group by various projects eventually raised the funds necessary to purchase two original Shaker buildings at the South Union historic site. The museum moved to its present location, the historic site of the South Union Shaker Village, in 1972. Today the organization maintains and interprets nine original Shaker structures on nearly 500 acres of farmland. The Shaker Museum is located in the 1824 Centre / Center family dwelling, a 40-room dwelling filled with original artifacts exemplifying the Shakers' craftsmanship and unique way of life. The museum and Shaker Village, 896 Shaker Museum Road, are one mile south of Highway 68. Both the Shaker Museum and Shaker Village are on the National Register of Historic Places.



### See also:

- Papers of Frances J. "Thomas" Whitaker, O.S.B. (1916-1994) are found in the Special Collections Library at the Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, KY. The correspondence, research notes and manuscript articles by Brother Whitaker, a Benedictine monk who lived and worked at St. Maur's Priory, formerly the South Union Shaker Village in Logan County, Kentucky, from 1954-1988. He amassed a large collection of photocopied research material on the South Union community as well as other Shaker villages and museums in the United States. The collection also includes his research on various Catholic topics.
- “A Benedictine Link With The Shakers”, Brother Thomas Whitaker, O.S.B. [member of the St. Maur’s Priory], The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October, 1969), Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY, pp. 360-369.
- By Their Fruits: The Story of Shakerism in South Union, Julia Neal, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1947, 292 pages.
- "Brief History of the Shaker Colony at South Union, Kentucky", Elizabeth Coombs, Filson Club History Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 3 (July 1940), John P. Morton & Company, Louisville, KY, pp.154-173.
- South Union Shaker Village internet site – <https://www.southunionshakervillage.com/>
- The Story of the Shakers, Flo Morse, The Countryman Press, Woodstock, VT, 1986, 109 pages.
- “Shakertown Buidings Now House Benedictine Monastery, Seminary”, Park City Daily News, Bowling Green, KY, 11 March 1956, p.6.





Shaker symbols include the tree of life with its orange and green apples like the tree in the garden of Eden.