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MATT GARDNER
HOMESTEAD MUSEUM

Newsletter

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Opening of the Matt Gardner Homestead Museum



On Saturday, September 18, 2010, the doors of the Matt Gardner Homestead Museum were open for the first time to the public on a regular basis. It was a joyous occasion and a fun filled weekend for family, friends and the community. The last communication we had with you, we were in the early stages of rehabilitation and restoration. How did the opening come about? Glad you asked! It all started with the focus of a "hands-on history" work day by staff and students from the Center for Historic Preservation at MTSU arranged by Caneta Hankins, assistant director of the CHP on behalf of the Murfreesboro-based center with help from Mike Gavin, preservation specialist. The 10-person crew spent June 4 at the house museum removing wallpaper and modern paneling to expose the original paneling, removing aluminum windows, and doing general cleaning. The focus of the work day was to help move the house a step closer to its original appearance and opening. Not only did the work day move the museum closer to opening but per Dr. Antoinette van Zelm, historian with the TCWNHA, it allowed both staff and students "to learn about the lifestyle of rural black Americans during that transition period in the first decades after emancipation." Moreover, Hankins added, "The Gardner family has been very determined in their efforts to restore this farm and to tell the story of their family and of other African-Americans who have contributed to every aspect of Giles County history." Also present that day to help and assist the CHP staff and students at the museum

Continued on page 2

Opening cont. from front page



Thanks to Eva Claire Smith and the Elkton Historical Society for providing lunch for the workers during the interior renovation

“Board member Diana stepped back in amazement at the beauty and condition of the natural wood the staff and students had exposed and restored”.

was MGHM board member and volunteer Diana Steelman. As the 10 person crew worked throughout the day transitioning from one room and job to another, Diana watched and observed the different techniques required to restore and rehabilitate the interior of the house museum. After lunch, which was prepared and donated by Elkton Historical Society board members Eva Claire and Carolyn Thompson, and by the end of the day when all was said and done, board member Diana stepped back in amazement at the beauty and condition of the natural wood the staff and students had exposed and restored. She stated her wish that we could open the museum for others to see this, and the response from CHP assistant director Caneta was that if you can, then you should, it

would be the best thing for the museum. In July the Gardner family held its 30-year reunion in Franklin, Tennessee, with a day trip to Giles County which featured a tour of the Elkton community and included visits to Union Hill Primitive Baptist Church, a Rosenwald school built in 1930 and the first black public school in Elkton, and St. Elizabeth Primitive Baptist Church, one of the oldest African American churches in the Dixontown community of Elkton. There were also tours of the African-American cemeteries in Elkton once known as the African-American burial grounds. The last stop on the tour was the Matt Gardner Museum where family members and friends stepped back into time and for a moment. All felt and shared the culture, history, and heritage of not only their family but all African Americans of the South. All the family and friends on the tours were so excited and thought all the

history and heritage that they learned about their families and the Elkton and Dixontown communities was just awesome. At the beginning of July after the above sequence of events and many more, the president took the idea of opening the museum to the board and got a yes vote. With all the information and techniques Diana had learned and observed about restoring the house from the CHP’s staff and students, and with the help of the local Giles County sheriff’s road crew, the Elkton and Indianapolis, Indiana, Gardner family members, and the Elkton and Pulaski community, we were just like Nike and **just did it!**

To read and see more about the time line and additional sequence of events of the restoration and opening of the museum, please see our website: www.mattgardnerhomestead.org

Continued Encouragement and Support Helps in Opening of the Museum



The weeks and days leading up to the opening, as well as the opening itself, included the continued encouragement and support of our many nonprofit and state organizations as well as the local community, and we could not have done it without all the support that those corporations, businesses, organizations, and individuals. We could not have gotten to the opening of the museum without the help of another supportive partner, Humanities Tennessee. Through their support and the guidance of consultant David Currey, the museum has gone from the planning stages to the opening of the museum. Yes, both Humanities and David were right there in the weeks and days before the opening, helping to make sure that the current interpretation of the museum and exhibits were on track for the September opening and in alignment with the museum’s future plans, and for the first time our consultant meeting was held at the museum in the Gardner family’s dining room. We were all gathered around the wooden family table that Matt built in the late 1890s just as they used to be. This was very exciting for all that participated.

A Time to Celebrate

The opening weekend celebration included a Friday evening reception. The reception included food, punch, and a little something to toast the hard work and dedication towards the opening. Everyone in attendance received a first-time tour of the Matt Gardner House Museum. The reception also gave family members, friends, and museum board members the opportunity to sit down and get acquainted and converse with local community officials and friends, as well as a lot of drive-by and drop-in

curious folks, interested and glad the museum is opening to visitors. Throughout the week leading up to the opening and at Friday's pre-opening reception the museum received donations of things lost or stolen from the museum; these items included period lumber, a color TV, Dutch girl quilt, small farm equipment, kitchen items, and volunteer time and labor. The week of hard work and the reception was an enjoyable and good time had by all.



Finally.....We Did It

On Saturday, in conjunction with the opening, we had our second Annual Folk Life Festival sponsored in part by the Tennessee Arts Commission. The festival included vendors and period demonstrators, more food and fun, and the 10:00 am Grand Opening Ribbon Cutting. Some of the other highlights of the day included Nashville's Global Education Center storyteller and poet Thandiwe Shipharh, Caribbean and West African dancers, and Shannon Holland's Djembefole percussion ensemble, as well as Pulaski's Temple of Praise mime team and Appalachian performer Mrs. Kitty Saufley. The audience of both children and adults enjoyed the food, music, and performances.





CIVIL WAR TRAIL SITE DEDICATED IN ELKTON

“With the balance of my command I moved to Elkton. From Elkton I directed my course toward a government corral at Brown’s plantation, toward Pulaski”...

General Nathan Bedford Forrest



The **Civil War Trails** is a multi-state program that identifies, interprets, and creates driving tours of both the great campaigns and the lesser-known Civil War sites such as the site at Elkton.

On Friday, October 1 at 10:00 a.m. an historic event took place along the beautiful Elk River just across the road from MGHM. As part of the Tennessee Civil War Trails Program, Elkton became the second location in Giles County to dedicate a **Civil War Trails** marker. The location of the marker and dedication is at the south end of the Old Iron Bridge over Elk River. Dr. Carroll Van West, the director of the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University and the area director of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage along with Ms. Lee Curtis, Director of Program Development at the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development in Nashville, made brief speeches honoring the occasion. The Civil War Trails is a multi-state program that identifies, interprets, and creates driving tours of both the great campaigns and the lesser-known Civil War sites such as the site at Elkton. The Elkton Historical Society (EHS) submitted an application in November 2009 to the Department of Tourist Development for an 80/20 matching fund grant. The EHS was elated to be awarded the grant and funded 20% of the cost of the marker and trailblazer signs. Trailblazer signs

are posted along US 31 Highway and direct people to the site.

Because of the narrow crossing area at the Elk River in Elkton, this became a very strategic point for both Federal and Confederate troops. In November 1863, General William Tecumseh Sherman and his entire Union army passed through here on his march from Memphis to Chattanooga. Local tradition tells us that General Sherman camped overnight in Elkton at the Reason’s Inn, Cabinet & Coffin Manufacturing. On Nov 6, 1863, at 9:00 PM, General Sherman writes to General George Crook and refers to the Elk River being an obstacle, saying, “Even as high up as Elkton, where your officer passed, it is nearly swimming to a horse.” On September 26, 1864, General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his Confederate troops passed along the intersection where the Civil War Trails marker is located on his way north from Athens, Alabama. He states, “On the morning of the 26th, the march toward Pulaski was renewed. With the horses captured at Athens and the Sulphur Springs trestle, I was now enabled to mount the troops that had been marching with my command on foot and to supply others whose

horses had given out. I ordered General Buford to move along the dirt road parallel with the railroad. (This was through Prospect, which lies west of Elkton). With the balance of my command I moved to Elkton. From Elkton I directed my course toward a government corral at Brown’s plantation, toward Pulaski.” General Forrest referred to this as “up the pike road to Pulaski”.

A map showing all the locations of Civil War activities across the state of Tennessee is available to download from the Civil War Trails website at www.civilwartrails.org



PICTORIAL OF THE RESTORATION WORK



Lending their hands were (from top left) Ann Hendrix, Jennifer Butt; on porch(Katie Randall, Katie Merzbacher, Kristen Deathridge; bottom row (Antoinette van Zelm, Kira Duke, Sara Rieger. Crew chief, Mike Gavin, is in the second floor window and Caneta Hankins took the photograph.



Taking a lunch break and visiting with Eva Smith from the Elkton Historical Society, who provided lunch for the workers.



To begin, in the first floor room, wooden ceiling trim, corner trim, and base boards were removed, numbered, and nails hammered back through for safety. These trim pieces are stacked in the room for recycling projects as needed. The sheets of modern paneling are stored in the barn for reuse or disposal. Beneath the paneling in the first floor parlor was wallpaper attached to netting.



Pieces of the wall paper were saved for documentation (one piece of the paper and border was left in a labeled envelope in the room). As the paneling was removed and then the wall paper, the original paneling, in very good condition, began to emerge.



(L) The wallpaper was removed revealing identification numbers and lengths printed on the back. (R) Corners, as usual, had more paste and required some extra steps to remove.



(L) Before the modern paneling and wall paper was removed.
 (R): Taken back to the original wood walls.





The two upstairs rooms required all day to remove one layer of wallpaper over newspapers (the only date we found was April of 1938). A solution of liquid fabric softener and water was sponged on the walls. This not only loosened the paper but settled the dust at the same time. A lot of scraping still had to be done to remove small pieces. Afterwards, the walls were brushed with clean water to remove more pieces. In the room where you ascend by the corner stair case, there was evidence of a fire in the corner near the door leading to the adjacent room. Also water damage from leaks is evident on some boards, though generally speaking all were in reasonably good shape. As soon as possible, the missing ceiling and wall boards need to be replaced and the whole building should be reroofed to seal and stabilize the house. Some of the walls in these two rooms could also use a sanding with fine grit paper over a sanding block, nothing harder or harsher, and another cleaning with Murphy Oil Soap or something similar.



(L) By the end of the day, the exterior looked even more authentic without the aluminum windows and screens; windows were washed; and three rooms were well on their way to being completely restored to their original appearance. We left with an appreciation for this house and for its builder and for those who have called it home for more than 100 years.

YOU CAN HELP WITH THE RESTORATION WORK

As mentioned at our 30th year Gardner/Coleman family reunion the museum is in desperate need of a roof and some other needed restoration work not to mention the need for continuous grounds and museum maintenance and utilities now that it is open. We have come a long way.....but we still have a ways to go and we need your help and continued support by purchasing a membership or making a general donation. For those family members who already has memberships we appreciate and thank you for your support and you will receive a renewal letter when your current membership has expired.

Thank You To All For Your Support, Time, Talent and Treasure

We would like to say **thank you** to the following businesses and individuals for their help and support in getting the museum open from Tennessee: The Rogers Group of Pulaski, Richland Inn, Home Depot, Giles County Sheriff's Road Crew, Gary and Tidal Gardner, Margaret Campbell, James Sanders, Stanley Jr. and Kalab Gardner, Diana Steelman and from Indianapolis Indiana: Veon Garrison, Jesse Lowery and Andre Neal.

Thank you to our opening reception sponsor: Robin Bankhead of Indianapolis Indiana.

Thank you to all our 2nd Annual Folklife Festival volunteers: Tidal Gardner, Margaret Campbell, Donna Baker, James Sanders, Kalab Gardner, Diana Steelman, Kelly Donnelly and from Louisville KY: Shirley Thomas, Vicki Boyette and Laquita (Kiki) Jenkins

Our New Members:

Rosa Harding, Indianapolis, IN
Faye Sweeney, Montgomery AL
Emma Price, Indianapolis, IN
George Hastings, Louisville KY
MyEvelyn Paul, Williamstown NJ
Mitchell Birdsong, Pulaski, TN

