FROM THE NEW ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS

I would like to introduce myself to the readers of Expedition and express my vision of museum work.

My career in museums was founded on my curiosity about the past, expressed initially in a desire to trace back in time the common things we see today. Older styles of American furniture, architecture, and photographs captivated me. My search to understand them began with books, then led to antique shops, collecting souvenirs, and finally to museums. My innate interest in the past evolved into a 20-year career in history and anthropology museums.

After receiving a master’s degree in museum studies from the Cooperstown program (SUNY), I moved to Philadelphia in 1976 for my first professional position, at the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies. The Bicentennial was an exciting time to plan and implement a major museum exhibition with architects, designers, fabricators, film-makers, and research scholars. This experience served me well in later years when planning exhibits at Winterthur in Odessa, the Chester County Historical Society, and Valley Forge National Historical Park.

My transition into cultural anthropology came as part of my growing interest in non-Western histories preserved in oral traditions. That intellectual road led me across the country and to varied experiences in the Southwest. For the past ten years I have been engaged in fieldwork there, particularly with Pueblo communities in New Mexico. My future book, based upon my dissertation research at the University of Arizona, is on the fascinating career of the first Native American academic anthropologist, Dr. Edward P. Dozier (1916-1971), who personifies the blending of Pueblo values into traditions of anthropological research. Fieldwork for a tribal museum survey conducted with the Arizona State Museum led to a position on the Collections Committee of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian. As a faculty member in the anthropology department at New Mexico State University, I taught museum studies and gained administrative experience as the director of their university museum.

My vision for collections and exhibitions at the University of Pennsylvania Museum is based upon my diverse experiences as ethnographer, teacher, and administrator. Translated into everyday terms, my first responsibility is to listen well and learn from the faculty, staff, volunteers, and members who preserve the “institutional memory” of the museum. My second is to offer recommendations for structuring the complex process of coordinating a staff of over 130 people to plan exhibits and to manage collections. My third responsibility is to administer these programs in a financially responsible manner and in support of the educational mission of the museum and the university.

The lessons learned from ethnographic fieldwork and applied projects with the National Park Service and Southwestern Indian communities have formed who I am as an ethnographer, one with a keen awareness of the responsibility of museums in cultural representations.

Marilyn Noronis
Associate Director for Collections and Exhibitions

New Perspectives on Shaker Life

An Archaeologist Discovers “Hog Heaven” at Canterbury Shaker Village

David R. Starbuck

I believe that the Shakers need to be studied as systematically as any of the other cultures that are observed by anthropologists. That is why, since 1977, I have been studying Canterbury Shaker Village in central New Hampshire (Fig. 1), one of the best-preserved centers of the Shaker millennial faith. Canterbury is a good representative of the larger Shaker movement in that its members were celibate in order to serve only God; they chose to live communally so as to isolate themselves from the “world’s people”; they followed the dictates of their early prophets, Mother Ann Lee, as amended by a series of Shaker millennial laws (see box on the Shaker Faith); and they believed in a duality of male and female principles.

During the early years of our research, the work conducted by me and teams of students was relatively eclectic and interdisciplinary, including archival research, oral history, the mapping of the village’s surface, and the preparation of historic structure reports and measured drawings of buildings. I was often able to interview and interact with the last three members of the Canterbury community, although that opportunity ended in 1992 with the passing of the last Canterbury Shaker, Sister Ethel Hudson. Spending hundreds of hours with the Canterbury Shakers helped me to realize that every one of them was a unique individual with strong opinions and personalities, often with a delightful sense of humor, and quite incapable of uniformity of thought. Some years ago one of the Shaker Sisters in Sabbathday Lake, Maine, commented that she “did not wish to be remembered as a chair.” In a sense this is the ultimate expression of Shaker humanity, because it is far too easy to identify the Shakers with their products and manufactures rather than to think of them as knowledgeable informants and purveyors of a distinctive culture. Nor should the Shakers be viewed as resistant to cultural change or oblivious to worldly feelings. One day when I observed one of the elderly watching “Wall Street Week” on the Shakers’ color television set, I was told that this was her favorite show because “Louis Rukeyser was so handsome!”

But it should not be implied that the Canterbury Shakers were entirely open or “easy” to informants either. When our first field team arrived at their village in the summer of 1978 (Fig. 2), we expected them to cheerfully allow us to ask all manner of questions about what they “really” believed and to discover what sorts of turmoil boiled just below the surface at this seemingly placid community. To our surprise, the Shakers announced that they would be interviewing themselves on tape—answering questions of their own choosing—and that the students we had hired for this purpose would have to do something else. Thus began years of surreptitious and hurried note-taking as I ran back to my notepad whenever I

The evidence we found for Shaker consumption patterns at the end of the 19th century has raised profound questions about what it means to be a Shaker

Marilyn Noronis