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Project Zion Podcast

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

**Karin Peter** 00:33

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is a show where we explore restoration history. And I'm your co host, Karin Peter. Today's episode is a collaboration with Community of Christ historic sites, as we interview the presenters from the 2020 historic sites summer lecture series, and these lectures can be found at historic sites foundation.org. Our guest today is Wendy Eaton when he works at the Joseph Smith historic site in Nauvoo, Illinois. Hi, Wendy.

**Wendy Eaton** 01:09

Hello.

**Karin Peter** 01:11

Welcome back to Project Zion. It's good to have you with us today. So your lecture in the historic sites summer series is titled stories behind the preservation of the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois. Now you work at the site and Nauvoo. So let's start there. Tell us a little bit about the site kind of an overview of the Joseph Smith Historic Site.

**Wendy Eaton** 01:38

Joseph Smith Historic Site spans the southern 40 acres of the peninsula of the town here in Nauvoo. So we are surrounded by the Mississippi River here. It's a beautiful location. We care for 19 buildings, both the physical care and preserving the stories of the buildings as well. Five of those are open to the public typically, not this year. But that would be the homestead Mansion House, Red Brick Store and the Visitor Center with the Nauvoo House kind of as a special edition some people get to go in. But since we use it as a rental facility. We're not able to take every tour into that place. Probably the most visited place on site would be the Smith family cemetery, which is still open to the public. So if people do choose to visit Nauvoo in this year, they really shouldn't be traveling. But if they do show up, they can go in and look around the cemetery. There is some work being done in the cemetery right now they are replacing the fence this week. So that's been fun to watch happening, the ongoing preservation here.

**Karin Peter** 02:51

So having been to Nauvoo, and the Joseph Smith Historic Site many times, it is a wonderful experience to visit and to go through the five buildings that are open, I have my favorites of all of them along with my favorite stories from the tour. So I'm really excited that we're talking about it today. So in your lecture, you tell several stories from the site, and you do a very clever thing and that is you. You share through the lens of one individual is kind of the tour guide for your lecture about the site. And the

person that is your narrator is Vida Smith. So who is Vida Smith? And why did you kind of talk about the site through her lens?

**Wendy Eaton** 03:38

Vida is fascinating. And I have to say that I haven't paid a lot of attention to her until recently. I've been doing a little investigation in the last couple weeks since my lecture, just to find out a little bit more about her. She was born in 1865 in room number nine of the hotel wing in the Mansion House. She's the second child of Alexander and Elizabeth Smith. So Alexander would be one of Joseph and Emma's children. Vida is either the sixth or seventh grandchild of Emma, I'm not exactly sure where she falls in the line, but one of the first 10. Most Community of Christ members would be familiar with Vida as a hymn writer. She is the one who wrote "There's An Old, Old Path".

**Karin Peter** 04:32

Yes.

**Wendy Eaton** 04:33

And so most people again, that's how they're going to know her but she wrote so much more than that hymns and other hymns that she has written, she wrote during her life. She wrote for a number of the different church publications, especially for youth and for women. There was a magazine called Autumn Leaves that she wrote for that was specifically geared at youth. She wrote to volumes of church history for youth that were published in 1914 and 1918. And 1918 is the year the site here and Nauvoo officially open as a historic site, probably in some of the preparation for that publication that two volumes of church history, she visits Nauvoo, and she comes with her husband, I won't get into too much of him. His name is Heman Smith, he was the official church historian for some time. But as Vida visiting here, she writes her memories of childhood, as she's viewing these the grounds and the homes that is so connected with her family. And I know you're not supposed to let your bias show when you are presenting history, but I'm going to be very upfront my bias of history. I'm not a wife, or mother. And so often unless you really dig, that's how women are painted in history is either a wife or a mother vida is both. But when she is writing in Autumn Leaves of this particular visit, to Nauvoo, she's in the mindset of reporting how it looks, but then thinking back to her childhood, with her grandmother, Emma, and that is a role that I could connect with. I am a granddaughter, I have a grandmother that I think very highly of who lives up in Maine. And when Vida writes of Nauvoo and her childhood, it's completely intertwined with Emma, her grandmother. And I have the same feeling when I think of my grandmother in Maine and the family history that I have up there. So finding this document of Vida's really helped give me the feminine voice that I was missing in the previous research that I had done. There are women voices in church history, they sometimes they take a little digging to find. But so often it's male voices talking about the activities of men. So I was, I was really happy to find this document of Vida's because it really helped me connect more with the story I was hoping to share.

**Karin Peter** 07:25

Oh, absolutely. So let's talk a little bit about the sites that Vida writes about, and that are part of the Joseph Smith Historic Site for which the church is responsible for preservation. Let's start out with the Homestead because that's kind of the first building that we go into on the tour. It's kind of where things start. So let's talk about that.

**Wendy Eaton** 07:49

So with the Homestead, and since my lecture was the development of the site, I thought I should probably address a little bit of the property ownership in Nauvoo, even though that's not my favorite subject to talk about, but it's pretty significant. Back in 1839, when the churches settling Nauvoo, they don't have a lot of finances, and so they have to purchase a lot of the land and the existing building, such as the Homestead on credit. And Joseph Smith, as President of the church is also trustee and trustee for the church. So all of this purchasing and use of credit is under his name, which ends up being a problem for Emma when he dies, there is so much confusion over who owns what. And this isn't just on personal levels that you hear about the strife between Emma and Brigham Young, but there are state conflicts between Missouri and Illinois and even the federal government over who owes who money over the various different purchases. It's somewhere around 4000 acres of land and a riverboat, that Joseph Smith, and the church has accumulated debt over that they turn around in the years after his death to have to try to figure out who's getting what. And I try to be pretty fair minded when I look at this, because it's very easy as a Community of Christ to completely sympathize with Emma in her struggles. She sees these as her homes. She wants them for her children. But Brigham Young is also leading a church, they have finances that need to be resolved. They need money to make a trip West. And so you just get all this legal strife and financial strife happening here in the city. After Brigham Young heads West, Emma ends up embroiled in about 12 years of legal battles, before she finally has ownership of what we would consider the core of the historic sites, including the Homestead and Mansion House and several of the other homes that are here. It's just kind of a testament to her, sticking it out in the long run to deal with 12 years of legal battles with all this conflicting property issues. It's crazy, it's complicated, but it's significant that she is able to hold out and obtain the property that she does so that her children can inherit. Because as they grow, and their children inherit the properties, now you're suddenly in the 1900s. And we're developing the Historic Site. So it's easy to reach that transition, of going from family properties to a historic site that's open to anybody to come visit. Your other questions a lot more fun with property dealings, and particularly with the homestead. The homestead itself is, is where Joseph Smith spends most of his life here in Nauvoo. But it's also very much the beginnings of the family home here. And you get a history of two different Latter Day Saint churches, finding their beginnings and Nauvoo here, of course, the overall larger Latter Day Saint tradition, but then Community of Christ as well, because when Joseph the third grows up, he inherits the home, and he is running his church from this home before he agrees to move elsewhere. It's a charming little house, I would not want to live there today. But it's it's the well preserved structure that has so many great stories in it. And one of the things I talked about in the lecture, and if you have a chance to go watch the lecture, you really should because I show a lot of images of the site and I show a picture of a violin. So when I started with Historic Sites in 2006, part of that summer was spent with artifacts, I was at Kirtland Temple, and I was spending a lot of time in the basement of the Temple, measuring stonework, and looking at different artifacts that I would never have thought of as artifacts. It gave me an appreciation for what is that tangible evidence that has been left behind through history. And so as I was looking for something completely unrelated, in the attic of the Visitor Center here in Nauvoo, this last winter, I saw a violin sitting up on the top shelf, and I pull it down, and I brought it out to where I could get a better look at it. And inside of the violin, there's a maker's label, and it reads, made by Frank Carroll Nauvoo, Illinois, year 1927, of wood taken from the residence of Joseph Smith, the prophet at Nauvoo. And so I pretty quickly went from handling it with my bare hands to putting on

curator gloves to handle this piece, because not knowing quite what the significance was of it at the point. But I started doing a little extra research on it. And in a February 2 1927, Saints Herald article, I find that Frank Carroll had given this piece to the Historic Site and it became part of a collection, there was remodeling being done the previous year in the homestead to make it so that guests could come in and tour the space. They had to remove some of the wood, and they gave a piece to Frank and he crafted this violin out of this piece of wood and then turned and gave it back to the site. And this is what I love so much about the artifacts. We know the Smiths were a musical family, Emma and her contributions to the various hymnals early in the church, her children and grandchildren like Vida writing hymns that are still being sung to this day. It's easy to make the jump to music being very much a part of family life there in the Homestead. And so then to move nearly 100 years later, to have a musical instrument created out of part of this home, it makes this connection with the family and music that you normally couldn't put your hands on. And just out of pure curiosity. I looked for some information on Frank Carroll the violin maker. He's not a church member. I believe he's part of the Lutheran Church here in town, but he is the son of German immigrants, I think he's born in Ohio sometime in the 1860s. And then his family moves to Nauvoo, which has a long Germanic history. And I don't know if he would have ever known Emma, there's a good chance he would have known who she was. She was greatly treasured in the community in her later years. But he grows up here, and the writings that have been left behind of Joseph Smith the Third, we know how much he treasured the immigrant community and care for them, that there's a very good chance that Joseph would have been aware of the Carroll family, even if he didn't know Frank, because there's quite an age difference between the two of them. For them, Frank to grow up and be a part of creating this instrument I thought was, was pretty interesting. So you hit multiple levels of history with this one little piece. And the violin needs work. I mean, I don't know how to play a violin, but I know it can't be played in the condition it's in right now. But it was a lot of fun to find that piece just sitting up in the attic. It makes you wonder in people's homes, what things they have just sitting around that they don't realize they're sitting in their attics that need to be taken better care of, or can help tell their own family stories.

**Karin Peter** 16:25

That's a marvelous story and a marvelous gift from Frank Carroll, to the Historic Site. So we have that property, which is where things kind of started as you talk about and where the family first settled in Nauvoo their first residence. But then if you go across the street, from there, you go to what's called the Mansion House. So let's talk a little bit about what's transpired in the life of the Mansion House. It fell into quite a state of disrepair for a while and has taken in a lot of preservation effort. So let's talk a little bit about the Mansion House, which by the way, when I first heard Mansion House, I was thinking something totally different than what I saw when it came to Nauvoo.

**Wendy Eaton** 17:11

Well, compared to some of the other homes it is, it's a mansion, it's much bigger than some of the other homes here in the community. Joseph Jr. spends very little of his life in the Mansion House. It's so often that's the home that people associate with that I think it's because it's so grand compared to some of the other places here in the community, the historic places. And when I went through Vida's information, I loved what she wrote about the Mansion House. So I'm going to read that quote, even though I read it in the lecture, just because I like what she says and how she describes this. So just again, to reminder, Vita would have never known her grandfather, Joseph, she's not born until 1865.

And so we are looking at the Mansion House, as it would have been as a family home in the 1860s, and possibly right up into the 1870s with the words that she has here. So Vida writes, "There was laughter and merriment in the big house for the young delighted to gather there. One by one, the boys cross the old stone step, each with a wife until three daughters in law called Emma Smith mother, the first grandchild came into the family in the homestead, a remarkable little lady. She was with big brown eyes and quaint, dainty ways. Then the first grandson was brought home. Then the family circle became disturbed by a movement of some of its members. The church was reorganized and memory of this past persecution lent fear to the future. Popularity began to wane. In the midst of this, the Paul was spread in the mansion again, and while one dark guide son girded himself for the long, hard strife in his father's place, another closed his sunny brown eyes and his mother wept that they opened no more to comfort her the poet son David saying, It was then that my grandmother gathered up the one little grandson and whispered, I'm glad that he is named Frederick." There was so much emotion when I first read that quote, that it spoke to me of, yes, this is a beautiful house. There's all sorts of incredible things that are kept inside of it. But this is a family home for a family who was in the midst of some major transition during the 1860s and 70s. When Vida was a little girl So just to explain a few of the people in case people aren't quite familiar, the dainty little granddaughter would be Joseph the Third's daughter, Emma Joseph was her name. The grandson is probably Vida's older brother, who was named Frederick Alexander. The disturbance in the family circle is a couple of different things for one thing, Vida's father Alexander and her uncle's, Joseph and David, taking on leadership roles within the reorganization and eventually those roles, leading them to move away from Nauvoo and so this family unit where Emma has wanted to just stick out the rest of her life is suddenly starting to move away. And then the other disturbance that they talk about the sunny brown eyed son, Frederick Smith, Emma's second son, had a terrible illness, and he died in the Mansion House, and this was 1862. Emma would eventually have two grandsons that are named for her son, I mentioned Frederick Alexander, Vida's brother. But then Joseph, the third would later in Plano have a son that he named Frederick Madison, who eventually becomes one of our Presidents of Community of Christ. So there's a lot going on in the Mansion House, after what we think of with the 1840s time period. Alexander and David are sharing the Mansion House and hotel, they both have wives, they both have children, they're raising their families in this space. Eventually, Alexander moves his family to Plano, Illinois, and then later to Missouri. David, during all his travels with his role in the church, he eventually experiences some mental decline, and the family has to make the difficult decision to happen institutionalize. Both of them, Alexander and David have extended family who stay in Nauvoo. Alexander, it's a brother in law, so one of his wife's brothers, who stays in the Mansion House and kind of takes care of things for him. David's wife, Clara, I believe it's one of her brothers ends up staying here in the community. And I think they live in the Sidney Rigdon House, which is right next door to the Mansion House, I have to do a little more digging on that one. But for Alexander, even though he's left Nauvoo, whenever he's back in the area, he visits family like any of us would, and he stays in this home of his childhood. And he's able to then keep an eye on how things are going here in the community with his mother and her declining health. And then eventually with the properties themselves. He's the one that really starts thinking about the long term preservation of the Historic Sides in bugging the presiding bishopric about doing something with the site because he and his brothers don't have the money to take care of it. But the church really needs to step in and do something. So he's the one that really starts getting this idea of the Historic Site stirring in the broader church mind even though the cemetery would eventually be the driving force to establishing a historic site. Alexander's at a church reunion in the area, not in Nauvoo, but not too far away. When he

visits Nauvoo, afterwards. This is 1909 and he takes ill and ends up dying in the Mansion House, and then is transported to Lamoni, Iowa and he's buried there within 10 years of his death, that is when the major shift is starting of moving from family homes to Historic Sites. And as I mentioned, 1918 being the official date, where we really did open as a focused Historic Site. With the Mansion House most first few years, initially, the caretaker lives upstairs, this would be John and Ida Layton and tourists are taken through the downstairs of the Mansion House. But before any of this happens, you mentioned about the disrepair in the later 1800s. So Alexander has moved away from Nauvoo. It's a return trip that he realizes and hints from the community here and Nauvoo that the hotel wing is a mess, it needs to come down. It's a public safety issue. And so the Mansion House as it stands today is probably about a third of the size that it would have been back in the 1800s. But so as the Historic Site is starting in 1918, and those first few years, as I mentioned, caretakers are living upstairs. One of the fun things I noticed. There's also accounts of couples staying over in the Nauvoo House, which I think would have a little more appeal than the Mansion House. But anyway, it happened. It didn't happen for very long by the 1950s, that was no longer the case, the caretakers were not living in the Mansion House. And those honeymooning couples were looking elsewhere to spend their time together. There are numerous attempts at renovations and structural care throughout the 1900s. There's about a year long push in the later part of the 1950s. But there's nothing major that happens to the Mansion House until the 1990s. And they lift the entire structure off its foundation and they pour a new foundation in basement for the Mansion House, it's then put back in place. And for the first time that I can tell maybe it's the first time officially, tours are taken to the upstairs of the mansion houses well. Throughout its time, I would say 1940s into the 1950s. The Mansion House at time serves as the visitor center for visitors. So that would often be the first stop that they make. And they have a little they they call it a church literature depot. So think of all the brochure racks that are in the lobbies of our congregations. That's kind of what I picture they must have had to set up and I think it was in Emma's kitchen that they had that set up in. So it's it's an exciting life that the Mansion House itself has lived its transition from family home to curators home and tour stop and to now fully being a tourist location.

**Karin Peter** 26:53

And really, it's a very interesting structure to go through as as part of the tour. So you mentioned that people are a little bit less familiar with the the Nauvoo house if I was going to honeymooned in Nauvoo, I'd much rather be at the Nauvoo house than at the Mansion House myself, although the Nauvoo house has kind of an interesting vibe to it as well. So why don't you talk a little bit about its preservation. And first what it is its preservation and how it's used now.

**Wendy Eaton** 27:24

It's interesting that you say the Nauvoo House has a has its own little unique vibe to it, because that's very much, there are times that I can't stand the Nauvoo House. And then there are other times that I absolutely love the structure. And I think it has a lot to do with its original intention in the 1840s. It was to be a really big hotel. Joseph Smith and his family was going to have a suite of rooms and it was completely a place of overnight accommodation. That's essentially what it was. It doesn't get completed in the 1840s. It sits just a brick and stone shell for a number of years. It's Emma's second husband, Lewis Bidamon, who decides to preserve it in his own way, by taking down the existing wings and completing the corner portion of the structure. He and Emma move in around 1871. And they call it the riverside mansion. And when I'm thinking kindly towards the Nauvoo house, that's what I think of it as I



think of it as the riverside mansion, and I think of it as Emma's home. And the significant moments in her final years, she dies there, her funeral is held there. And when Vida thinks back to this home, so she would have been a little bit of an older child at the time of her grandmother's death. But she writes of the Nauvoo house or the riverside mansion, "It speaks to me of a beautiful personality that I have always felt within the deep old rooms." And so there's such a presence of Emma, when you have yourself in the right mindset, and you enter the building to focusing on that you get then when you're just going into make sure it's clean and ready for the next rental group. So today, we've gone back to calling it the Nauvoo House. Groups can rent it and stay there. We get a lot of family reunions, a lot of retreats that take place there. The John Whitmer Historical Association and Sunstone, Nauvoo. They both kind of focus on the Nauvoo House some of the attendance for those conferences stay there. There are classes and meals that are held in Emma's parlor there in the Nauvoo House. And it gets to be today, a huge variety of uses again I think that's why I at times have such conflicting feelings about the building. There are times that I love the activities that are happening there. And then there are other times that, oh, this group didn't clean up after themselves. We've got four hours before the next group comes in, we've got to rush and get this ready for them. But it's, it's an incredible building. And I appreciate that Lewis Bidamon did something with it. He's, he's got a fun history, you could spend a lot of time talking about Lewis Bidamon, but

**Karin Peter** 30:30

Maybe we'll do it. Maybe we'll do an episode on him sometime. Wendy, that would be fun.

**Wendy Eaton** 30:36

But the fact that he decided to do something with this, and it was encouragement from his step sons to provide a home for Emma to retire in that he looks at doing something with the structure. But it's a fun building, especially if I remember to remind myself that it's a fun building and Emma's home. And it's important to me as well, the I had spent several years in Kirtland as a guide, but I never came out here as a summer intern until my congregation had a retreat at the Nauvoo house in 2014. And I had arrived early with another to help with some of the setup and checking in. And Christin Mackay, who's now the Site Director, she called me back to her office here in the Visitor Center, and she's like, "What are you doing this summer?" She knew I was not employed at that point. And I'm like, "Okay, fine. I feel like I'm much too old to be an intern. But okay". And so I came to Nauvoo for the first time as a summer intern, after having that weekend retreat with my congregation. So who knows, what has happened is my congregation hadn't decided, oh, let's go to Nauvoo for a weekend, it may have paved the way to help me get into the life that I'm living now.

**Karin Peter** 31:58

True, and much better to go for the first time as a retreat than a honeymoon. So I'm glad that that was very good. I'm not going to get over that one, I'm just going to be honest. Okay, so the next, next, let's talk a little bit about my favorite building. And that is the Red Brick Store. I love the red brick store for a couple of reasons. One, the way that it serves as a for people who visit the site to buy something to take home as a souvenir is just really sweet and and is lovely. But upstairs, the Red Brick Store is probably my favorite place. It's the place that I am least happy about a small office there. And the place I appreciate the most the larger room and setting apart of the women for the women's Relief Society. So let's talk about Red Brick Store.

**Wendy Eaton** 32:58

Okay, so the original store opened 1842. And the structure exists until 1890. And then it's taken down it had fallen into some disrepair the brick was needed for other building projects. So they just took it down. For the 40 or so years in between. It's a pretty active location for the community. For the non church side of things. It's a general store. Of course, it's not the only one here in town, but it serves that purpose. So 1800s, it's a gathering place for people to come and swap stories and hear the news. It acts as a Civic Center or a Justice Center as well. There are a number of different hearings that take place, you start to get into some of the church legal issues with that, because there are some of the legal battles that Joseph Smith Jr is involved in that take place there in the red book store in that upper room. But it's also a place of classrooms for children, social gatherings, like I mentioned, but we there's a good document of a magic show being held in the 1840s. There's a traveling artist who puts his art on display up there. So it really is quite a multipurpose space set up a room for the for anybody who's in the community. As far as the church itself, that upper space serves for church leaders to have room to gather and meet including the little office that you mentioned. It'd be Joseph Smith Jr's personal off one of his many offices, and Newel K Whitney as the bishop he has an office and the downstairs location. But also for the church, the Relief Society officially organizes in the large upper room. There are worship services that happen they're probably in the 1840s but definitely by the 1860s. We know worship services that happen there. And for that little office. There, there are some critical moments in the church that take place in that space, some that make us cringe, but others that make us pretty happy. That's where the last blessing that we know of that Joseph gave his son to follow him into church leadership. So that took place there in the Red Brick Store. Some of the other activities that I think of 1848 Joseph the Third is a fairly young teenager, and his mother and stepfather decide that he needs to get some experience as a shopkeeper. And so he makes a stab at burning the store downstairs. He doesn't do a very good job, but one of the responsibilities of the shopkeeper is to guard the store overnight, so he's sleeping upstairs. And in his memoirs, he writes about waking up in the middle of the night to this incredibly bright lights. It's so bright that it disorients him and he runs into a wall as he's trying to make his way to the larger room to the windows. He looks out the windows and he sees that the temple is on fire. He leaves the store, goes up the street about a block and makes he stays with Emma, he wants to make sure his mom is safe because he is rightly afraid that an arsonist has set fire to the temple is somebody going to come after my mother next. So he stays with his mother. his stepfather is part of the team that heads up the hill and tries to extinguish the fire. That's a pretty significant moment in Joseph's childhood that takes place right there in the Red Brick Store. In his early adulthood, as he's beginning his leadership with the church, a little branch organizes they're in Nauvoo, and at first their meeting in homes, but eventually they grow big enough that they decide to use that upper room in the store. They call themselves the Olive Branch. And if you think back to the earliest church seals, kind of the logo for the church, you see an olive branch on there, signifying the peace focus that they're looking into. And this is an interesting little branch. So Joseph Smith is president of the church, but he's also pastor or presiding elder of this branch. So he's getting some on ground congregational leadership, as he's president of the church, in this little building. And Alexander, his brother receives this first priesthood call in the upper room of the Red Brick Store, the story, something along the lines, the priesthood were gathering there in the upper room praying over the needs of the congregation. And they recognized that they needed I think it was a teacher, the office of teacher, and several of them ended up speaking to Alexander being a good person to fill that role. And



Alexander doesn't want anything to do with that he gives up and stands and he gives this wonderfully long speech about how he's the worst person in the world to have any kind of priesthood office, he doesn't want it. And by size, I'm a terrible preacher. And one of the brothers gets up and says, Well, you've just been preaching so well for the past five minutes, and he eventually accepts that priesthood call and Alexander would eventually go on to have the role that his grandfather had as patriarch or evangelist of the church, in the later part of the 1800s, up to his last years of life. So some really significant moments happening in the upper. So it's taken down at 90, as I mentioned, it's it's an open law until the 1970s 1972. It's the focus of the summer archeological dig. And the decisions made that this building is historically significant enough that we really need to rebuild it. And I believe it's 11 families that they talk to to financially support this building project. And they fund it, they get the building up. And by 1980, of the centennial of the founding of the movement. The Red Brick Store is once again part of the historic site and tours though in there. It's not until 1992 that the gift shop opens downstairs. So prior to that it had just been used for tourism and for educational purposes. But then today, we do use it for a huge variety of different things. Of course the gift shop downstairs, but the tours ended upstairs. We have classes that are held upstairs. There are occasional community activities that are held up there. One of our longtime volunteer tears, he's a magician. And for many years, he would put on a magic show in the Red Brick Store. And those always a lot of fun, it would bring people from the community into to experience the Red Brick Store. And then in 2018, over the summer, that was the year we were recognizing the centennial of the historic site, we decided to have weekly Sunday evening gatherings. So we revived the Olive Branch. And there were not many priesthood members amongst our staff that particular summer, so it fell on me largely due to a lot of that. But John Charles stuffy, who some of the listeners might be familiar with, he and I work together to put together those weekly worship services. And it was an interesting experience for me, I've been a part of pretty traditional Community of Christ congregations, but to post invitations in the general store downstairs to the general public, to just say, we're having this Sunday night, here's the topic we're talking about, you're welcome to show up. So we would never know who is showing up what Latter-day Saint sect tradition are coming from, we had no idea how many to expect on a given Sunday evening, the work of summer students that year was pretty mixed when it came to faith. And so they sometimes they would show up, sometimes they want it. But it was an interesting experience. And right at the end of that summer, I had been talked into holding a communion service as our close to the summer series. I did not want to do that. But I came to, well, a couple of apostles that some of the listeners might be familiar with talked me into doing it. And I went into that service pretty nervous, I was still a fairly new priest at that point. This was my third time serving communion. And I was in charge of the entire service, John Charles had gone back home by that point. And so I was pretty well on my own for this. And we hadn't had a lot of success with our advertising to get just random walk-ins, who had taken tours that Sunday to show up that Sunday evening. Well, we had people show up that he made and for this service that I did not really want to do. I had two LDS men and one Restorationists man who showed up for this communion service that I was completely in charge of. It was interesting. I'm not sure I'm ready to tackle something like that, again, completely by myself. But I'm glad I was pushed do that, even though I really didn't want to.

**Karin Peter** 42:56

Well, in the tradition of Alexander being pushed into it, even though you didn't want to that's an appropriate place to have that happen and to share in his legacy of capitulating to those who get us to

go a little bit outside of our comfort zone. So yeah, it's a good experience to share. Thank you. So I wanted to just briefly give you an opportunity to say something about the kind of the lesser known structures at this site, you said that several are used for guests or for other purposes, including staff housing, do you have a favorite among them, or an interesting story from one of the lesser known buildings on the site?

**Wendy Eaton** 43:38

Since I haven't spent a lot of time looking at stories to some of those lesser known structures. I can't say that I can report on a lot that are strictly history. This is where we get into some of my fun on site, because we venture into some of the folklore that's here. And so stories that there might be an element of history to them, but they're not well documented. But one of which that is fairly well documented. Three houses down from the Red Brick store is the Wright house. And that's one that has had a lot of remodeling done over recent years we've had an incredibly generous donor group helped us with that renovation project. And it's one that we hope to be able to rent to visitors to the area that not only will give visitors a chance to experience living in the Historic Sites, but it'll help bring a little income to the Historic Site, which is always a benefit for us. But one of the stories with this house is that during Joseph Jr's lifetime, there's one of the many moments that he needs to escape for rest. And he borrows a boat from the right family. The boat has a leak in it, but he needs to get out of town. And so they put the boat in the Mississippi River, which is just across the street from this particular house. And the story goes that the men had to bail the boat out with their shoes or their boots as they were rowing across the river on this particular evening. So it's, it's stories like that there's there's great documentation with that one. But there are other stories that are a lot of fun to tell, but maybe aren't the most historical. I think the one that I feel the safest sharing so that it doesn't get out of hand. It's a mixture of both history and folklore. And it's a Lewis Bidamon stories, that's always fun. Not a lesser known structure, because it would be the Mansion House. But when he's early in his marriage with Emma, and they're living in the Mansion House, when guests would stay there because they're running it as a hotel, he would tell them about secret tunnels that Joseph Smith had dug from the family homes there on the flats, up to the Temple. And he told so many people this story that it's spread wings, we know he's telling the story that's pretty well documented. But we're also pretty confident just knowing the stories of Lewis Bidamon, an insight to his character, that he is completely making the story up. But he's still telling the story and it persists to this day. Occasionally, you will have people show up on site and ask what about the secret tunnels that went from the Mansion House up to the temple? And you're like, Oh, well, let me tell you about Lewis Bidamon. So it's a great story that he is intentionally creating folklore for the Nauvoo community. And like I said, is the story that comes up every now.

**Karin Peter** 46:55

That's wonderful.

**Wendy Eaton** 46:57

There are all sorts of stories that are along those lines that I wish I had more time to be able to, to puzzle them out and find the truth, the history that's in them, because they're great stories to tell. But I'm hesitant to tell them without getting myself into trouble or spreading rumors.

**Karin Peter** 47:18

So you've done a great job Wendy of sharing about the site itself. And I am encouraging our listeners to watch your entire lecture. But I wanted to ask you before we close, you've worked with Historic Sites for some time, Kirtland, and then here in Nauvoo, how is this journey with kind of the history of the church informed your own personal journey of discipleship?

**Wendy Eaton** 47:48

I've had some incredible mentors in my life, especially when I was a teenager, as I was growing into understanding what my own journey was going, I know discipleship groups that are not interchangeable, but for my discipleship. That included recognizing as a teenager that I did have priesthood calling in my life. And to have these mentors around me when I was a teenager was great. When I think about a lot of the development that I've gone through in recent years, it's completely from my time here in Nauvoo, and my time at Kirtland learning, the patience that you have got to have when you're on your discipleship journey, both with yourself and with the people that are around you. Because you never know who you might be inadvertently mentoring. I think about how much I've had to learn to remain calm under pressure. Because especially here in Nauvoo, I had a few experiences in Kirtland, but more so here in Nauvoo situations where I've had to keep myself really calm, because there's a guest that's maybe making me really irritated with the questions that they keep pushing. And I know that it's the training that I've had here that I'm able to keep my temper under control, and carry on in helping them with where they're at and the information that they want, but without letting things get out of hand. And I haven't spent a lot of time in Plano, Illinois, which is about four and a half hours from here. But the last time I left Plato, I recognized that I have lost an opportunity that I should have taken while I was there. And as I looked back on some of the stories in our larger church history, I see that there are so many choices that whether they were made or not made, whether they turned out to be the right choice or not, but we've had to just carry on and do the best we can with the decisions that were made. And if a wrong took place because of those decisions, then we need to do our best to face it, and resolve it as best we can. There's just so much practical discipleship that I have picked up, especially around the full time staff that I have the wonderful opportunity to work with. And then the volunteers that have been in and out of the sites that I've gotten to meet and gotten to know. It's been a remarkable experience to have spent so much time and not having attended back in 2006 to end up spending so much time with church history.

**Karin Peter** 50:52

Well, it's been wonderful to listen to you share some of your expertise in what you've learned in, in working with church history. In your, in the notes from your lecture, you wrote that Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation has a tagline of "Your Story is Church History". And we know that's true. Generations of people have family history that is built into the properties that Emma held on to for the family, and that became part of the church Historic Sites. But countless others have history associated with or shaped by the Historic Sites, the buildings, they're the legacy, the stories behind them. And you're right that you are inviting folks to share their family stories to help continue to build the histories of not just the site there at Nauvoo, but the site at Kirtland Plano, stone church and liberty Hall. And so if you have listeners family stories that contribute to the histories of those sites, Wendy would love to hear them as she lives out that tagline, "Your Story is Church History". So before we bring our episode

to a close, Wendy, do you have anything any closing thought or anecdotal story that you'd like to share before we wrap it up?

**Wendy Eaton** 52:12

I could probably go on for a very long time. Stories that I've accumulated over my years with the historic sites but don't get the chance to share all the time. But you you've just said so well, what I want it to push that our stories are so important. And when I was doing this initial work, this has been a multiple year project for me. I started this research back in 2017, in preparation for our centennial, and a summer student from the 1960s. I think 1964 Lee Updike reached out to me back in 2018, and said, "I'm coming to Nauvoo, I want to talk to you about my time as an intern." And so he and I talked back and forth. I can't remember exactly what happened, but I was not able to give him his tour. I don't remember what it was. But he emailed me all the different stories he wanted to share. And it was a wonderful insight to what it was like for a student in 19. I like I said, I think it's 1964 of what it was like giving tours here at that time. And it's such a very different experience than what I had as an intern. And so it's so important to preserve those stories. So again, if if people have experiences with the Historic Sites, whether they were summer interns or they have family connections here, I really would love to hear those stories and help preserve them for the future of the Historic Sites.

**Karin Peter** 53:59

Thank you so much, Wendy. And so listeners, you can contact Wendy at weaton, that's weaton@christ.org. And if you would like to listen to and see the wonderful photographs that Wendy shares in her lecture, and I would encourage you to do so that you can go to [historicsitesfoundation.org](https://historicsitesfoundation.org) and click on the summer lecture series. So if you have additional comments or questions, when do you would love to hear them along with your history stories? This has been Cuppa Joe, part of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host Karin Peter. Thanks to Wendy Eaton. And thank you for listening.

**Josh Mangelson** 54:54

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