April Friends Work “Party”  by Mac MacK

I always thought the word “party” denoted a great time, a fun time, a swinging time, a time to laugh, joke, talk, exchange ideas, have a good time, and, in general, leave the party feeling good about yourself, others, and what had just transpired. I suppose you could say that the Friends of the Kelley Farm Annual Spring Work Party, its Spring Fling, met all of those criteria and a bit more. Certainly all of the above actually happened and some more as well. Those hands that showed up were most welcome and they were welcome to work, too…and work they did. Raking, planting, cleaning, storing, stowing, tending, window washing and wood splitting, all under bright blue skies that covered 35 degrees across the ground. Cool, yes, but fortunately the wind short breaks from time-to-time and it wasn’t too bad. No snow and no snow blanket. Thank goodness.

If you’re of a mind to help at the next Spring Fling, keep us in mind and check next winter’s newsletter for details and date and time.
Friend Spotlight: Smitty’s Workshop by Mac MacK

There are friends of the Kelley Farm and there are Friends of the Kelley Farm. The former, the friends, are anybody who comes out to the farm to visit, takes a stroll around the patch and likes what they see. Sometimes these folks sign up for the Friends of the Kelley Farm, a group of people who actively work towards making the Kelley Farm a better place. These Friends do a variety of tasks around the Farm and elsewhere, all of which serve the interests of the Farm and go a long way towards the goal (as stated above) of making the farm a better place. One such Friend is Aaron Smith of Smitty’s Workshop.

Aaron is the gentleman who puts this newsletter to bed, in printshop speak. He takes all the articles and the several pictures, and puts them in place to make up the newsletter you hold in your hands. He does all the layout, artwork, and the many other little things that make this newsletter the high-quality, professional-looking publication that goes out across the country several times a year.

Smitty wasn’t always the polished craftsman that he is today. Born in Cold Spring, Minnesota, he grew up in that small central Minnesota town. As a kid, he wanted to be an architect. He used to watch Bob Villa on This Old House and got the bug to build, to create, to design, and this led him to where he is today, albeit in a roundabout way.

At Saint John’s University he majored in Art, Printmaking, and Photography. After college he began to put his design sense to work with another historic Minnesota property The Saint Paul Hotel. Soon he started thinking about starting a design business out on his own.

He was going out elsewhere too, with Anne, the love of his life. Due to some suspect study habits, Aaron ended up spending a 5th year at Saint John’s. It was in this fortuitous last year that he met Anne, a student at Saint Ben’s. He helped her with a class or two and she helped him realize that she was the best thing that ever happened to him, and that was that. They married, now have three wonderful children and live down near where the Elk and the Mississippi Rivers connect.

Back in 1998 they founded “Smitty’s Workshop” (SmittyPages.com) a business formed around creative design, photography and printing. It worked. They started with nothing and built it into a thriving business. Now Smitty’s Workshop builds websites, designs all kinds of things from museum exhibits to lunch boxes, and creates content for businesses across the Midwest and beyond.

But I digress. Smitty is a great friend (and Friend) of the Kelley Farm. He prefers the historical side, especially the house, because it offers a look into the lives of 19th Century life. He is looking forward to all the new facilities because they will greatly enhance the telling of the Kelley Farm story, offer a look into the past – and the future, of all facets of farming in America.

“We help people tell their story,” said Smitty, and they do it well. This newsletter is the perfect example. We are deeply indebted to him.
Spotlight: ReNee Hanson by Mac MacK

There’s a young lady working at the Kelley Farm who is, for the time being anyway, the mainstay of the place. She is ReNee Hanson and she is in the front office most all the time. ReNee (Re-nay) is the general gofer, the go-to, the one person who is in the office while all the others are out on their rounds, doing whatever important things they do that need doing.

ReNee was born in Ames, Iowa, and moved a bit from Iowa town-to-town as her father moved for work. If Iowans had passports, hers would be full of visa stamps from Waterloo, Denison and small towns all over western Iowa. Finally, her parents saw the light and moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where they still live.

She had big ambitions as a kid, deciding in the 7th grade, after getting braces, that she wanted to be a dentist. This goal stood her in good stead all the way into college at the University of Minnesota, but came to a screeching halt when she didn’t do as well as she might have in chemistry. Those darned academics wanted a passing grade and ReNee came just short of the mark, cutting short her dreams of crawling around inside people’s teeth. Instead she opted for dental hygienist school so she crawl around peoples’ teeth.

The road to certification was a long one and involved a good many detours along the way. Reckoning that ‘you do what you have to do’ to make ends meet and to get to where you want to be, ReNee has had quite a bit of work experience. She began her work career at Arnold’s, a Minneapolis restaurant, where she met her husband, Marc (22 years ago). She has worked in the grocery business, various retail stores, and even as a pothole filler for the Eau Claire street department in her younger days. Of course she continued as a dental hygienist and still does so, part-time, to the present day.

ReNee has been at the Kelley Farm since 2004, recruited by Nancy Benz to the Friends of the Kelley Farm as they struggled to keep the farm open. Their efforts worked and she has been with the Farm ever since. She likes the Farm, the people at the Farm, and darn near everything else about it. While she prefers outside to inside work, right now she helps in the office. She’s good with paperwork, right enough, but she does all the costuming as well, including making buttonholes, a trick unto itself.

“There are smart people out there,” she said. “This is my passion,” adding that she loves to see kids out there especially, because she likes to see the kids learn about the farm, about its history, and about history in general. “It’s different every day,” saying that they can learn about the whole process of the farm and its life cycle in one weekend.

Her favorite activity? Watching the House Ladies making sorghum. She would like to see wind-powered irrigation at the Farm but that won’t be happening anytime soon.

She’s not strictly an office girl, however. She has been known to watch a bit of TV (Big Bang Theory and Downton Abbey are her favorite shows) and she reads quite a bit. (Little Women is her favorite book.) She’s a quilter and a gardener but both activities have been curtailed somewhat but her working weekends at the Farm.

Quite the busy girl, our ReNee. Quite the driver, too, except when it comes to grocery carts. You might ask her about that the next time you see her.

We’re looking forward to all types of wonderful events coming this season. You can currently see baby animals, the early plantings, the last of the roots from the root cellar, and a growing crop of new Visitor Center facilities which we hope to begin harvesting later this year.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

FARM ANIMAL WEEKEND

June 4th and 5th

FATHER’S DAY

Fathers get in FREE, if accompanied by a child.

Get the latest and share your photos on our Facebook page.
In October of 2006 Oliver Hudson Kelley was inducted into the Agricultural Hall of Fame in Bonner Springs, Kansas. The Hall honors individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the furthering of agriculture. Their honor roll includes past Presidents Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln; inventors John Deere, Cyrus McCormick, and Eli Whitney; scientists George Washington Carver, Norman Borlaug, and Luther Burbank; and a range of others including entertainer Willie Nelson and Andrew Volstead, past Congressman from Minnesota.

The primary reason for Kelley’s induction was his co-founding, in 1867, of the National Grange and Order of the Patrons of Husbandry. The Grange educated farmers and their families and created a social fraternity that united farmers nationwide. Kelley was also an innovator. He used his farm in Elk River to experiment in seed selection, irrigation technology, animal feeding & care, and treatment of soil.

The Kelley Family owned the farm from 1849 until 1901 when it passed to other ownership. Kelley, himself, had limited involvement on the farm, once the establishment of the National Grange took off in the late 1860’s. In 1934 the State Grange of Minnesota encouraged the National Grange to purchase the property with the intent “…of acquiring and maintaining the farmstead of Oliver Hudson Kelley as a memorial for posterity.” The National Grange purchased the property and held it until 1960 when they donated it to the Minnesota Historical Society. In 1964 the Kelley Farm was designated a National Historic Monument by the US Department of Interior.

Kelley was a pioneer farmer who is recognized for his work as an early practitioner of food production sciences—and as an organizer. The National Grange and the State Grange of Minnesota are still active to this day. His scientific approach helped set the foundation for the emergence of modern agriculture—in Minnesota, in the United States, and throughout the world.

In modern society where the average citizen is at least two or three generations away from life on a working farm, interest abounds in where our food comes from and how to guarantee a safe and healthy food supply for future generations.

New construction rises from the ground at the Kelley Farm, and new programming tells both Oliver Kelley’s story and the complexities of modern agriculture. We marvel that this all began 150 years ago when a local farmer dreamed and worked his farm on the banks of the Mississippi River.