



Amite County Historical and Genealogical Society

Dawn Taylor, President

Wayne B. Anderson, Secretary

William G. Barron, Vice Pres.

N. Gay Blalock, Treasurer

Allen Terrell, Council-at-large

Wayne B. Anderson — Newsletter Editor

December 2016

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Without a past, there is no future

Next meeting:

The next meeting will be the annual Open House; there will be no business meeting. The Open House will be at the Rev. Milton Shirk home across the street from the Library from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm. See minutes at right for details.

Future Meeting Schedule

December 3, 2016 — Annual Open House.

January 14, 2017 — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

February 11, 2017 — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS. Filed trip to grave of Col. Thomas Hinds in Jefferson Co. following meeting.

March 11, 2017 — Field trip to New Orleans to visit Chalmette Battlefield and other sites.

April 8, 2017 — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

May 6, 2017 — Heritage Day. Society activities to be announced. No regular meeting.

June 10, 2017 — Annual meeting with election of officers in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

July 2017 — No meeting.

August 12, 2017 — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

September 9, 2017 — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

October 14, 2017 — Regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the library in Liberty, MS.

AMITE COUNTY HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Minutes of the November 12, 2016 meeting

DRAFT

Due to the field trip following the meeting, the business session was kept to as brief a time as possible. President Dawn Taylor called the meeting to order at 10:05 am. Allen Terrell gave the invocation.

The minutes of the October 8, 2016, meeting were not taken up for approval due to Secretary Wayne Anderson being absent due to illness.

President Report:

President Dawn Taylor welcomed new members Jim and Dee Lindley and guests Anna Whittington, her mother, and her young daughter.

Pres. Taylor then distributed invitations to all present inviting them to the Open House on December 3, 2016, at the Rev. Milton Shirk home across Hwy. 569 from the Library. She provided extra copies of the invitations for meeting attendees to distribute to others.

For Open House members may park in either the Blalock store lot or at the Library but are cautioned to leave room for guests near the Library to facilitate their attendance. Setup for the day will begin at 8:00 am with the festivities schedule to

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begin at 10:00 am and running until 2:00 pm.

Vice President Report: VP Barron gave a brief overview of the plans for the field trip and explained why the cemeteries chosen were included. He passed out a key to aid in understanding the Jewish cemetery that was on the agenda.

Secretary Report: None.

Treasurer Report: Treasurer Gay Blalock was not present.

COMMITTEES: No additional reports.

Old Business: None

New Business: None

Other Business: None

Announcements: None.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 am to allow attendees to load up for the auto caravan with Gillsburg first on the list to be visited.

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Contributions to Newsletter

Society members and other newsletter readers who have stories, family information, or other information that might be of interest relative to Amite County history or genealogy are encouraged to share through the newsletter. Contact this editor and I will send you the instructions for how to submit your contribution.

Report on November 12, 2016, Cemeteries Field Trip

Members of the SW MS Genealogical Society joined the ACHGS group at the Old German Cemetery in Osyka. There were approximately 30 participants in the group. VP Barron gave background on the cemetery and its importance to Amite County History. Participants took photos of headstones for the Find-a-Grave internet database, placed a few American Flags on Veterans' graves, and attempted to read the headstones using the keys provided in the hand outs.

After lunch at Osyka Seafood the group continued to the Osyka Cemetery where they placed flowers on the grave of Reverend Milton Shirk. Lynn Williams, a member of both ACHGS and SWMGS, then arranged a surprise viewing of Reverend Shirk's last home in Osyka just a few hundred feet from his final resting place. The new owners of the home have done an amazing restoration job and very graciously invited us up the drive.

The trip then continued to the Jewish Cemetery in Summit, MS. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the day and the weather could not have been better! Miranda Whittington was our youngest participant at 11 years old and was a delightful student of history for the entire outing!

The day was brought to a close by Pres. Taylor and closed in a prayer for traveling mercies led by Dee Lindley! All in all a very successful trip!

— *Contributed by Dawn Taylor. Edited by Wayne Anderson.*

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BITS AND PIECES OF AMITE COUNTY HISTORY

This month's column was taken from a draft brochure being created for the Open House on December 3, 2016, at the home where Rev. Milton Shirk lived during his time in Liberty.



REVEREND MILTON S. SHIRK & THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE

Traveling with the Baptist Association in 1853, Rev. Milton S. Shirk journeyed from New York State to Liberty, Mississippi. As an educator, he carried with him the vision to educate and enhance the lives of young girls in small rural counties.



He used his own funds to establish the Amite Female Academy (AKA: Little Red School House, Liberty MS). His contribution added three buildings which included a music department to the already structured school. This provided space to house both students and teachers. His academy was successful in teaching core standards of reading, writing, and math as well as fine arts such as music, etiquette and decorum. That success was sustained for nearly a decade, maintaining a steady flow of paid tuitions of satisfied pupils until two years after the start of the Civil War.

In 1863 Union soldiers pounced on Liberty with direct orders to pillage and demolish every pillar of the property. The school was torched, and many valuable items were destroyed. The music building was last in line to meet destruction. Rev. Shirk could only look on hopelessly and helplessly as his dreams literally went up in flames. The commander of the Union troops saw Rev. Shirk and recognized him as a former classmate. Because their paths had crossed previously and perhaps positively, he refused to issue the command to burn the Mississippi music building in Liberty.

It was the only building of the Amite Female Seminary left standing after the siege. Contrary to its name and popular believe what we loving call the Little Red School House has never been a school house but has served as a part of educational complex. In the 1930's and 40's the building was used as a music room again and then became the Town Library until the current facility was built. **See editor's correction/clarification of this information at end of article**

Today, the Little Red School House stands as a historic landmark, being added to the national registry in 1980 and currently serving as a museum. It graciously greets visitors from all corners of the globe. Rev. Milton S. Shirk extended the torch of educating and refining the lives of young ladies in Mississippi through his vision of advancement through education and etiquette. The Reverend expressed a well-received belief that building a formidable foundation of confidence and self-esteem helps pave the way to enlightenment and empowerment beyond expectation.

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Rev. Milton S. Shirk Obituary

Milton S. Shirk was born in the State of Ohio, November 27, 1818. He attended school at Oxford and Grandville, in that State and later he entered Madison University, New York, where he graduated in 1848 from both the literary and theological departments. He was converted at the age of seventeen years, uniting with the church at Oxford, Ohio, of which his father, Elder Joseph Shirk, was pastor.

On coming to Mississippi, after teaching school about one year, he attended the meeting of the Baptist State Convention at Grenada in 1845. He united by letter with the Preston Baptist Church, Yalabusha County, and was licensed to preach. He was recommended to itinerate for one year in the bounds of the Convention. God blessed the work and during the year some four hundred and fifty persons were added to the different churches. He was ordained in 1846 at Columbus, Miss., during a meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. Mr. Shirk was married three times--first to Miss Eliza S. Washburn, and, after her death in 1871, to her youngest sister, Miss Emma H. Washburn, who died in 1886. In December, 1888, he was married to Miss Marty J. Jesse. He left no children.

For a time he was president of the Pearl River Institute at Monticello, Miss., and after this he established the Amite Female Seminary at Liberty, Miss., in 1853. This was continued with large and increasing patronage until broken up by the war, when his extensive college buildings, with their contents, were burned by the enemy. During all these years he had the pastoral care of three to five churches, which he served monthly. He was for a time pastoral supply of the Coliseum Baptist Church, New Orleans, resigning to accept the presidency of Shreveport University, in Louisiana. Mr. Shirk's last location was at Osyka, Miss., where he spent the remainder of his life, or something like twenty five years. Here he taught school and was pastor of the Osyka Baptist Church and a number of others in the country. He frequently preached from manuscript, and his sermons were models of good English and consecrated thought. He was a man of reserved manners and dignified bearing. In a life prolonged to nearly eighty years, and a ministry of more than fifty years, Mr. Shirk saw almost the entire Baptist ministry of the State changed. In his heart was embalmed the memory of W. H. Holcombe, W. Carey Crane, S. S. Parr, S.S. Lattimore, H. B. Haywood, and James G. Hall, the giants of former days. Next to these came E. C. Eager and Henry Pitman. Then the Middletons, Minters, Norvell Robertson, William Mullins, Samuel Mullins, Thomas Bond, Samuel Bullock, Zachariah Reeves, Jesse Crawford, Ham McKnight, and other of more recent memory.

The statistics of his ministry can only be given as he remembered them, as his memorandum book was lost during the war. The number of sermons preached may be given at 6,000; number of baptisms, 2,000; number of marriages, 400; and the number added to churches in meetings where he labored, 600. After a pilgrimage of fourscore years, less a few days, he died at his home in Osyka, October 31, 1898, and was buried in the town cemetery. Since Mr. Shirk's death his third wife has also passed away.

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The Shirk Home in Liberty

Prior to 1863, the Amite Female Seminary covered the property from the present day town hall, library, Little Red School House and the property across present day highway 569 North. The home located directly across the highway from the current Liberty Library and diagonally across from the Little Red School House. The original house was building around 1853-55, and was much smaller than its foot print today. The core is still there and can be viewed by those treated to a trip into the attic. Other rooms were added after Reverend Shirk had moved on to other pursuits.

The current owners of the house purchased it basically sight-unseen when they were preparing to retire from the Navy and come back to the states from their lengthy tour in England. Fred and Debbie Miller have done an amazing job restoring the home and turning it into a show place. Filled with grace and Southern hospitality, it is the venue for the 2016 Amite County Historical and Genealogical Society's Annual Christmas Open House, December 3, 2016, from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

****Editor's clarifying note:***

While the Little Red School House never served as the traditional stand-alone school building in which all classes/grades were taught, it did see service as classroom space up through the school year ending in the spring of 1960. I can speak to this because I attended classes in one of the two rooms of the building when I was in the eighth grade. The building was made part of the Liberty Grammar and High School complex much earlier and did see service primarily as a music instruction/practice space before the increasing number of students in the school forced use of all larger rooms as class space. The number of students increased in the 50s and early 60s for two reasons: first, the baby boom generation came along following World War II; second, smaller schools were consolidated into either the Liberty or Gloster systems. Two schools that I specifically remember being consolidated with Liberty were Gillsburg and Mars Hill. Once the school year ended in spring of 1960, all teaching moved to the new school complex located southeast of Liberty (outside the Town Limits at that time). Demolition of all the school buildings other than the Little Red School House and the grammar school building (which was to the northwest across 569) began soon after the school buildings were vacated and the area was later developed by the construction of the current library building and the Liberty Town Hall.

Reminder: Crosby Flood Relief

This drive will remain open through the December Open House and the society will make a presentation of the funds prior to the Christmas holidays. We have contacts with Operation Restore Crosby that will assist us in getting the funds into the proper hands. A link will be provided on the Facebook page to a PayPal account where donations can be made. Checks can be sent to the ACHGS at PO Box 2, Liberty, MS 39645 with "Crosby Fund" noted in the memo space on the check. The preference is to use the PayPal link. Our goal is to raise at least \$6500.

Give Today!

