

## Shirley Cousins Reunion Project: The Thomas and Mollie Grubbs Shirley Memorial

In 1990, four of the Shirley cousins, Bobbie Bragg, June Osterbur, Eileen Denhart and Margo Elmhorst, attended the Shirley Convention at Cave City, KY. The convention was hosted by the Shirley Association and we had a chance to meet it's founder, Betty Shirley, and also James Howard Young, a Barren and Metcalf County, KY, Shirley descendent and historian. They took us to the farm where our ggggggrandparents, Thomas and Mollie Grubbs Shirley, are buried. James Howard showed us approximately where the graves are, but the small rectangular stones that used to mark the graves were long since gone. Both he and Betty Shirley said some of us needed to do something to mark the graves before all memory of where they are was lost.

Then they showed us where the original Shirley house used to stand nearby, till it burned in 1885. James Howard said when he and his cousin, Alton Shirley, were boys they used to play in the hole that was the remains of the basement. Both men are now in their 80s and many stories of the old days have come down to them. The house was built of square hewn log framing with mud infill. The mud probably came from the spring, a few feet away, that is known to this day as Granny Shirley's Spring.

For years, the four cousins who went to the convention, remembered and talked about getting the graves marked, but it wasn't till the 2002 Shirley Cousins reunion, held Labor Day weekend at the home of Dub Yost, near Winchester, IN, that the need for a marker was presented. The reunion attendees voted to go forward with the project and Dick Moore was elected chairman of the committee.

In August, 2003, Dick and Connie Moore and Margo Elmhorst went to KY to look at the site and talk about how to proceed. We were met there by Alton Shirley, his son Timothy Shirley and James Howard Young. We found out that the farmer on who's farm the graves are, refused to let us put the marker on his farm, however Alton Shirley, who's farm is just across the line fence and in close sight, told us we could put it there. He stated that as long as he and his heir, Tim, are alive, we will have access. Alton's farm is part of the original Shirley homestead. Pictures of that meeting are included a few pages later. Pictures of Thomas Jr and Hannah Dale Shirley's headstones, which are on a farm a few miles away, are also shown. They are the first cousins' ggggrandparents.

The next thing was to set up a bank account to receive and disperse funds. Dan Whisler and Martin Gibbs agreed to open an account and administer the fund. It was named the Thomas and Mollie Shirley Memorial Fund.

Next, Betty Shirley posted a notice soliciting donations on the Shirley Association website. A copy of it is included. She also donated several Shirley items for sale for the fund. As a result of the notice, several Shirley descendents outside the Cousins Reunion were made aware of the project and donated to the fund.

In May, 2005, a letter was sent to people on the reunion list giving an update on the project and inviting them to the dedication.. A copy is included.

On Thursday, August 4, 2005, thirty people, from Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Virginia, and Florida met at the Cave City, KY Cracker Barrell for lunch, had

a group picture taken, then went in convoy to the Alton Shirley farm. Alton and his granddaughter, Whitney had a farm wagon ready with bales of hay covered with quilts for a hayride to the back of the farm where the monument had been set up the day before. It had been brought from the granite quarry in Elberton, Ga., by Fritz and Margo Elmhurst. Alton and Tim had poured a footer previously and they and Fritz worked many hours in 95 degree heat to get the base and monument set up the day before the dedication.

On the day of the dedication, the temperature was again 95, but the site was next to a woods and the afternoon shadows made a place to sit in the shade. Everyone had brought lawn chairs and there was ice water to drink. Some of the men laid out the fence, dug post holes and set the fence while the others got to know one another and swapped old timey Shirley stories.

When the fence was finished, we were called into a circle and the dedication began. Timothy Shirley, a Baptist minister, made the following remarks:

"We will never be able to know Thomas and Mollie Shirley. We can only know them by what they did, and I have noticed in studying their travels that in every place where they lived, they either helped to start a Baptist church or quickly joined one. That gives us some idea of what they were like and how they lived. These are our ancestors who prayed for us!" He then read from Joshua chapter 4. God had parted the waters of the Red Sea for the children of Israel and they had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Moses was dead and Joshua was now their leader. Before they could go into the Promised Land, God parted the water of the Jordan River also. Joshua told twelve men to get stones from the river bed, put them on their shoulder and bring them and place them on the other side as a memorial (!). "Then," he said, "when your children ask you, 'What is the meaning of these stones?' you can tell them (paraphrasing here) the great things God has done for us". That's the gist of what Tim Shirley said

It was amazing that without our knowledge, he chose that particular story from the Bible, because we had each been asked to bring a rock to place at the memorial. Each one got up and said where their rock had come from and placed it. Someone said we should make it a tradition that whenever someone comes to visit the memorial, they should bring a rock. Then Marilyn Smally's 5 year old triplet granddaughters put flowers at the memorial and Alton Shirley said he hoped that we would all visit. Tim asked Kelly Shirley from Virginia to pray.

Margo then said that the stone was pretty much paid for, but \$300.00 was still owed on the fence and we would pass the hat. We were astonished to find \$290.00 in the hat!!

At the beginning of the project, we estimated that we would need about \$2,000.00. We actually spent \$1,800.00 for the monument and base and \$300.00 for the fence, so the total was \$2,100.00. As of August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005 we have all but \$60.00 of that amount. A donated quilt will be auctioned at this year's reunion to help defray the remaining amount.

As a result of an error on the part of the retailer from whom we ordered the monument, we ended up with a \$2,400.00 monument but only had to pay for the \$1,800.00 one we ordered.

Many, many thanks to all who participated in this project by donations, moral support, or advice. Your help has been very greatly appreciated!!



Shoals on the Saluda River at  
Ware Shoals, S.C. about 3 mi from  
Turkey Creek Baptist Church.



Alton Shirley  
Shirley Farm near Wisdom, Ky



Fritz Elmhorst helping Alton level the base.



Fritz and Alton check for level.



1,000 pounds of stone, some rope and chain. How to do this??



Three hard working men "get 'er done!"



*One last tweak.*



*Nadine and Alton Shirley, sons  
Timothy Shirley and Fritz Elmhurst*



Fritz and Margo



The Supervisor  
"Himself"



*Right side*



*Left side*



Cracker Barrel, Cave City, Ky Aug 4, 2005



Shirley Family from Kentucky,  
Indiana, Illinois, Missouri,  
Virginia and Florida.



We had a hayride to the back of the farm.



The men put up the fence.



Project successfully finished!



After the dedication, Marilyn Smalley's triplet granddaughters placed flowers beside a flag brought by Marge Gibbs. Notice the "family rocks" at the front of the fence.