



Reflections on Hampshire250

The year 2004 is over and so is our celebration of the 250th anniversary of our county, West Virginia's oldest county. As I look back on the year-long celebration and think about our initial list of activities we hoped to accomplish, I feel happy and sad at the same time. I am happy that we accomplished a great deal. With the help of various organizations and individuals we have had some wonderful celebrations, and we have created memorials or programs that will help in the preservation and interpretation of our history for years to come. On the other hand, we fell short of some of our goals. All citizens of Hampshire County may suffer a loss because of this.

The memorial events like the celebration on May 1st and the evening history programs including the Richard Williams portrayal and the evening at the Presbyterian Church sparked a good deal of interest. Although they were single events, they will be a source of memories for a long time to come.

When I drive around the county and see all the Hampshire250 license plates I realize that many people were excited about our celebration and supported it in some way. The sales of the history book and the heritage music CD were very gratifying and people continue to buy these items. The creation of the Capon Bridge Museum was certainly a highlight of the year; it can help interpret our history for years to come. The tree that the Schools for the Deaf and Blind planted as a memorial of their opening in 1870 will be a point of interest through generations. The replacement of lost historical highway markers was a victory. And there were other projects that will have lasting effect.



However, there were some important things that we were unable to accomplish. Their lack will be felt not simply as an unchecked item on a wish list. They were designed to help us understand and preserve our heritage; some of our history will be lost because they remain undone.

First among these projects is an oral history program to preserve the oral history of our communities, sites and families. The passing of one of our Hampshire250

committee members, Virginia Pancake, reminds me of the stories that are lost as this older generation passes on. In the old days when there was no TV, families talked more and listened more and those stories got passed from generation to generation. In an era of over abundant amusement that has no relation to our localities or history, those stories are being lost every day.

We were also unable to do a photographic archive project that would copy and document photographs that capture our history from years ago and not to long ago. We hope that the Hampshire County Library will be able to do this in the coming year, but until they or some other organization can arrange for this, how many old pictures or important papers will be lost or forgotten?



Another area where we fell short of our expectations is in apparently having failed to raise enough interest in our history to increase the number of volunteers working for our local organizations that are preserving our material and cultural history. Sadly, America is loosing its “volunteer spirit” that has made it so rich in the past. Where are the new workers for the Historical Society, The Fort Edwards Foundation, Fort Mill Ridge, or even our local Land Trust? All of these organizations are in serious need of your help; if they fail, a part of Hampshire County will be lost.

What can you do? Close to home, you can make an effort to preserve your own family history by properly storing your photos and family papers and making sure that they will be preserved when you pass. You can record either on paper, by audio recording or video recording the stories of the older generation. You can record information about your home or items of furniture that have a special meaning. You could make sure that the local library has a copy of those items that are important to the whole community.



To help with our community’s history, you could get involved with a local organization that is preserving our heritage. Or you could get your favorite community organization (CEOS, veterans group, church, Rotary or Ruritan) to take on a project to interpret and preserve our community history. These should be ongoing projects, not simply a once-in-a-hundred-years program.

Then there is one last thing that you must do. You must make up for the greatest failure of our anniversary year. You must get our children and our schools involved! The children are the hope of the future, and if they do not know their own history, they will be condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past. They will also drift because they will have no sure foundation. Today perhaps half of our teachers have little or no

connection to Hampshire County. Our administrators are pressured to meet the demands of outside authorities even at the expense of local values and expectations. Unless we take the time to get involved and demand time and resources to teach our history, we might as well admit that we have lost our children. They are not really ours if someone else is filling their minds and forming their hearts.

Our history is part of who we are. Are we worth saving?

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Hampshire250 Committee