



MUSEUM OF ASHE COUNTY HISTORY

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Curator's Year End Report for 2010

I. Operations and Activities in 2010

a. Numbers

- i. **Visitors in 2010:** 2439 signed, plus several school and college groups.
- ii. **Accessions in 2010:** 190 (most consisting of multiple items)

b. New Operating Status

i. Change from Start to Run

The Museum has evolved from a construction and preparation phase to an operation, maintenance and growth stage. The first six months of 2010 were devoted to display installation, working with ASU intern Brad Farthing, Alex Worth and other volunteers. The rest of the year we have been learning what the daily routine requires: mopping the floors, replacing toilet paper, registering incoming artifacts, greeting visitors, selling Gift Shop items, keeping records, and a host of other tasks.

ii. New Revenue Streams

Thanks to Linda and Jim Payne, the Gift Shop is providing a stream of income for the Museum by selling books, local crafts and Ashe County souvenirs. Also, in addition to our established revenue from Membership dues and County Occupancy Tax, we now get a small, but significant, amount (usually \$50 to \$75 per week) from cash donations given by visitors and friends.

iii. New Funding Needs

Besides the major funding needed for restoration of the courtroom, we need ongoing income for operations. We are just barely meeting operating expenses at present, and do not have funds for exhibit construction or important maintenance issues, let alone the restoration of the second floor. We need money to repair damages from last year's ice and snow (without counting what may yet happen this year). Displays have been created at practically no expense by using cheap or free materials and volunteer labor. Our displays are improving, but are

not yet of professional quality. Some important maintenance to the physical plant has been postponed for lack of funds.

iv. Museum Personnel

In addition to the part-time Curator, we have two employees, Betty Eller and Gladys Brown, at 30 hours each per week. Their salaries are paid by federal Stimulus funds for job training, and do not come out of the Museum's funds. Linda Payne has acted as Volunteer Coordinator without pay, scheduling docents and Gift Shop staff. Our volunteers have been very helpful with visitors, and have learned the routine of handling sales in the Gift Shop. We are still short of volunteers for Saturdays. We seriously need computer-savvy people to help with Museum administrative work such as records-keeping, correspondence, internet tasks, digital scanning and graphics.

c. Activities in 2010

i. Moving and Installation

The heavy lifting of our move from the Temporary Museum to the 1904 Courthouse was accomplished in December of 2009 with the help of over two dozen volunteers. Since then, with volunteer help, we have created an introduction to Ashe County in the Hightower Room, displays in the Bare Room showing Ashe County home life and moonshine making, and an Ashe County Industries Room illustrating mining, WKSK radio, and co-op businesses Skyline Telephone Membership Corp. and Blue Ridge Electric Membership Corp. We have also created a Veterans Room telling stories of Ashe County citizens in the Armed Forces. Our exhibits continue to develop, and some are changed periodically to tell more of our stories.

ii. Grand Opening

We held our Grand Opening Celebration in July, with a public event and reception that brought in many officials and local folks who spread the word about our new County asset. We even heard good comments from people who originally had opposed the project, but were converted when they saw how beautiful the restored building looks.

iii. Gambill Painting Dedication

The Museum hosted the Baptist History Preservation Society for their dedication of Ron Adair's painting illustrating "The Ride of Martin Gambill." The deeds of this Ashe County patriot of the Revolutionary War were commemorated with speeches and an unveiling of the painting on the front portico and lawn of the Museum, followed by a reception inside. The painting is now on loan to us and hangs in the hallway.

- iv. Blue Ridge Parkway 75th Anniversary**

Carole Conrad took the lead in creating and manning a fine three-day display for the Museum and Ashe County at the Blue Ridge Music Center on the Parkway. At the Museum we built a display illustrating the history of the Blue Ridge Parkway and Ashe County's part in the story.
- v. 26th NCT Living History Weekend**

The 26th North Carolina Troops re-enactment regiment camped on the Museum grounds in September for a two day living history event. They portrayed Civil War period camp life, music, home life and children's games for school groups and the public. This event was well received and the members of the 26th have expressed eagerness to do it again in 2011.
- vi. WWI Armistice Day Exhibit**

In honor of Armistice Day (now called Veterans Day) we created a special set of displays in our Veterans Room. We wanted to give our visitors a reminder of what Ashe County soldiers experienced in the First World War, and why the Armistice meant so much to them. Veterans and families of soldiers have told us that this exhibit meant a lot to them. Many learned things that they had not known before about the First World War and Ashe County's part in it.
- vii. Christmas Decorations**

Linda Payne, Betty Eller and Gladys Brown took charge of Christmas decorations. Under their hands, the Gift Shop and exhibit rooms sprouted Christmas trimmings, and a beautiful Ashe County Christmas tree blossomed with hand-made decorations that would have adorned such a tree in 1904. Visitors were impressed with the period motif, and with the antique toys Santa left under the tree.
- viii. School & College Tour Groups**
 1. 1st Grade and 5th Grade classes and Home School students enjoyed tours of the Museum and in-classroom presentations this year, in addition to attending the 26th NCT Living History event in September.
 2. For the first time, Ashe County High School students and students from Wilkes Community College visited the Museum for general tours.
 3. Dr. Andrea Burns' ASU Public History Class partnered with the Museum to produce recommendations for grant searches, capital campaigns, brochure design and the use of Internet social media. Their work can form a foundation for our efforts in these areas during the coming year, and we owe them a large debt of gratitude.

II. Plans for 2011

a. Exhibit Development

i. Information & Signage for Present Exhibits

Our signs, labels and audio-visual presentations need to be completed in order to tell the Ashe County stories that our displays are supposed to illustrate. This work has been well-begun, but needs to be pushed forward. Volunteers with an interest in graphics and sign-making would be most welcome, as would people who like to work with sound and video.

ii. Development of Virginia Creeper Displays

As work on the "Virginia Creeper" HO-scale model railroad goes forward, we will begin constructing the artifact displays in that room. These will require setting up display stands and cases, installing lighting where needed, and creating labels and signage.

iii. The Hightower Room and Ore Knob Mine Displays

The 19th Century wall of the Hightower (Introduction to Ashe County) Room has yet to be set up. It will require display construction, signage and labeling. The Indian Artifacts display needs headlining, and we plan time-line labels for the entire room. We have many new photographs and fresh information to add to the Ore Knob exhibit, thanks to Marjorie Eckman, the widow of Phillip Eckman, who was manager of the mine in the 1950's until its closing in 1962.

iv. Civil War Exhibit for Sesquicentennial

2011 is the 150th Anniversary of the start of the American Civil War. If we can attract enough loaned artifacts, it will be appropriate for our Veterans Room to house an exhibit illustrating Ashe County's experience of that landmark event.

b. Audio-Visual Equipment from Martin Williams Memorial Fund

Counting what the Museum has received directly, and what is held for us at the Parish of the Holy Communion, we have something over \$1600.00 in memorial funds that Carol Martin has designated for audio-visual media and equipment. Carol has indicated that she will augment these funds with an additional donation. We will move ahead with the design of a program for the use of these funds and purchase of a large-screen TV and other equipment. Among other things, we expect to produce a video introducing visitors to Ashe County.

c. Opening the Courtroom for Limited Use

Thanks to Judy and Sandy Mitchell, the Courtroom has been cleaned up significantly. With a little more effort, we could open the un-restored Courtroom for limited public events that would both use the space productively and enhance public awareness of the value in completing the restoration.

Respectfully submitted,

Donald F. Long

Curator

24 JAN 2011