

Conservator's Holiday Review

Switzerland County Historical Society

A definite surge of energy was apparent at the three sites operated by the Switzerland County Historical Society. "Conservator's Holiday 2009" brought local members together with out-of-town members from Marysville, Tennessee, La Porte, Indiana, and Broadlands, Illinois to contribute approximately 350 hours to improve our sites, our textile collection and archives.

The focus for Monday and Tuesday was the barn at the developing Agriculture Museum Center. Under the guidance of timber-frame expert and educator Rudy Christian and his wife Laura, volunteers worked on the barn that was built in the late 1840s or early 1850s by the Thiebaud family. Rudy first pointed out that the region's virgin forests are still with us in this barn and others throughout our county and with proper stewardship they will last another 150 years.

Rudy then drew our attention to construction details such as boards made by various methods of sawing, materials recycled from previous structures and what part of the barn was the original structure and what parts were later additions. Originally a hay-press barn and later utilized to hang tobacco, the Thiebaud barn will eventually serve as an interpretive center to tell the story of various agricultural industries that have been part of Switzerland County's history.

While some volunteers continued their work at the barn, the major focus for Wednesday and Thursday was on the textile collection at our historical museum. Textile conservator Gaby Kienitz from the Indiana State Museum led volunteers on a discovery mission as we opened boxes of stored textiles including dresses, samplers, flags, christening gowns and a mourning cloth. Gaby's expertise helped us properly date items by their style and fabrics. We were acquainted with appropriate cleaning and storage techniques, how to do some basic repairs and we learned a few methods for preparing items for display. We have a tremendous amount of work ahead of us and now have a valuable resource person we can consult as we proceed.

Attention to our archives became the focus of some throughout the week as they worked on transcribing court cases. General fix-it projects on the historical museum and river history museum were also accomplished.

Our time was not all spent on work. On Tuesday evening our out-of-town guests visited the studios of woodworker Rick Starker, textile artist and painter Ann Farnsley and sculptor Anthony Catanzaro. Then Wednesday evening a pitch-in dinner was held at Pennington Place where the guests were staying, compliments of Rhonda Pennington.

The work was invigorating yet exhausting, and the camaraderie energized us all. Thank you to the following for all their hard work and ideas: Jane and Dan Geren, Myrna Madigan, Phil, Don Morrison, Helen Parks, Janet Hendricks, Caren, Morgan, Miles & Dylan Griffith, Al Stevens, Linda Papa, Carolyn Hysell, Wanda Benzing, Joyce and Ken Benbow, George Reed, Gary Bennett, Elizabeth Becker, Chris and Russell Baas, Rhonda Deeg, Zachary Bladen, Mike Schwartz, Betina Kemker, Bob Hater, Ann Farnsley, Joyce Stanley, Gwen Gutwein, Larry Braun, and Carrie Smith. You are amazing!

Martha Bladen