

HISTORY HELP

Board Field Trips Help Broaden Horizons

By John O. Hawkins, Museum Director, Caldwell Heritage Museum

It all began in the summer of 2008 when I reminded the Board of Directors that one of my goals for each year was to visit at least two other museums. I knew from previous visits to other museums that I often brought back new ideas that I could incorporate in the Caldwell Heritage Museum, where I serve as Museum Director.

Over a year before I had been invited to visit the History Museum of Ashe County at Jefferson, and that was the next destination I had in mind. One of the Board Members asked, "Why can't we go with you?" Another person mentioned that it would be great to have lunch at Shatley Springs, and still another one mentioned that the churches with the Ben Long frescoes were located in Ashe County.

One board member volunteered the use of his van and offered to be our driver, and I agreed to plan our trip. We decided that each person going would pay his or her own expense. We also agreed that we did not want our hosts to incur any expense because of our visit.

I contacted Don Long in Ashe County and immediately had a favorable reply. Don just happens to be a docent at Saint Mary's Church, home of three of the famed frescoes, so he could arrange a visit to the church as well. He also made a reservation for lunch at Shatley Springs and invited others to join us.

When we arrived, we were greeted by Don and some of the board members, who showed us how they

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were making use of the limited space they had in a store-front building. Then we were taken across the street to see their old Court House building that was being remodeled for the Museum's future home. (They have since moved into their new quarters.)

Some of their staff and board members joined us for lunch, so the fellowship and exchanging of information continued to take place. After lunch we went to Saint Mary's Church and spent a short time there studying those inspirational works of art. Don then surprised us by taking us to visit the Mountain Farm Museum, which is dedicated to preserving some of the area's vanishing farming traditions.

Our second outing, about six months later, was to Lincolnton to the Lincoln County Historical Association. The Historical Association maintains a museum, but it also owns several historic sites in the county. Executive Director Jason Harpe showed us around the Lincoln Cultural Center, where the museum is located, and took us to lunch at a nice little café on the town square. Then he took us around the county to see several properties that the group owns.

Our third trip, and the last one to date, was to Morganton where we visited the History Museum of Burke County. We feel a kinship with our neighboring county, because two of the founders of that museum had visited our facility and asked for information and advice prior to their beginning. Wayne Hitt served as our guide, and he was ably assisted by two others. Phyllis Wogan took us to the restored depot for the railroad exhibit. All these people answered our many questions and endured our wonderment.

After lunch we traveled to Valdese to see the Waldensian Heritage Museum. Gretchen Lane-Costner, Executive Director, along with three helpers, gave us the grand tour. We were impressed with this magnificent facility and its state-of-the-art exhibits. As an unplanned bonus, we also got to see the interior of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church.

Planning Field Trips

We are lucky that we have a van at our disposal, but not every group will be that fortunate. You may have to explore alternatives, such as borrowing vehicles from churches or civic groups for a nominal fee, or carpooling. We

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like traveling as a group because we have time to discuss what we have seen or what we expect to see.

It's important to recognize that not every member of a board will always be able to go. Some will have jobs or other responsibilities that they cannot leave for an entire day. Our number sometimes includes former board members, volunteers, or guests, depending on the space available. We jokingly tell them that they are future board members in training—and they might well be!

I would be remiss if I led you to believe that everything was perfect. On our way to Ashe County, we opted to take a short cut. Instead of turning right, we turned left, so our short cut turned out to be the long way. As we were returning from Lincoln County, the van had a flat tire. Neither of these setbacks was insurmountable, and our enthusiasm for other trips was not dampened. But these incidents have taught us to be flexible and not be upset by the unexpected.

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Benefits of Field Trips

Which trip was the best? That's an easy question to answer. All of them were the best trip. Each one has been unique, and each place we have visited has its own identity.

Without exception we have met wonderful people, asked questions, observed what others have done, and shared our ideas and our museum experiences. We have returned from each trip singing the praises of our hosts and resolving to do more at home.

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I think I can safely say that the Board of Directors of the Caldwell Heritage Museum endorses field trips. If you have not tried it, let this be a challenge. And if you're looking for a destination, consider this your invitation. We'll be good hosts because we've learned from some of the best.

Online Classes Offer Certificate in Running Small Museums

Museum Development Associates, a non-profit field services organization based in New Mexico, is offering Small Museums Pro!, a certification program for people who work in small museums across the country. The goal of this program is to provide practical guidance and education on running and managing a small museum. Online courses cover museum administration, collections management, collections care, exhibitions, and museum education and outreach. Selected classes are offered in the fall, spring, and summer.

The focus of this summer's class is "Museum Education: Crafting Great Learning Experiences." According to

the web site, participants will learn how learning occurs; how museums can facilitate learning; what resources are available to help in future development of educational programs; and how to develop and implement learning experiences, with participants developing a sample program.

Courses cost \$195 each. Please note that to receive Small Museum Pro! certification, participants must complete all five courses. For more information, visit www.museumdevelopment.org/pro.php, or call (505) 466-3480.