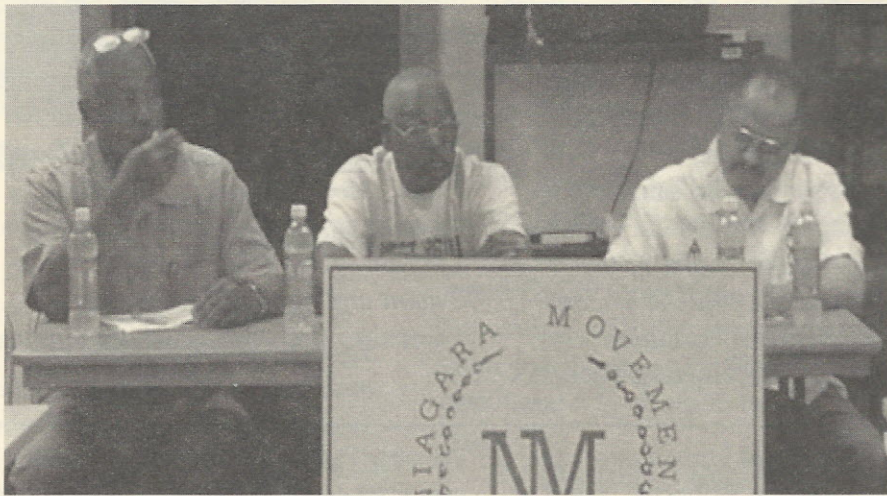


THE GUARDIAN

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Newsletter of the Jefferson County Historical Society
Safekeepers of Jefferson County History



George Rutherford, James Taylor (JCHS Board Member) and James Tolbert

Niagara Movement: Cornerstone of Modern Civil Rights

By Doug Perks

In Max Barber's words, "A more suitable place for the Second Annual Meeting of the Niagara Movement than Harpers Ferry would have been hard to find." In August 1906 46 African American leaders from 12 states and the District of Columbia met in Harpers Ferry to demand equal enforcement of the law for all races and active political involvement at all levels of society.

Harpers Ferry was selected as the site of the first Niagara Movement meeting held in the United States because of the area's natural beauty, because Storer College could provide adequate facilities for the meeting, and because John Brown's 1859 Raid to end slavery had made Harpers Ferry an important site for

African Americans.

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park will commemorate the Centennial of the 1906 Niagara Movement meeting August 16 – 20, 2006. The commemoration will include a public centennial commemoration, an academic symposium, and a teacher institute.

The commemoration got an early kickoff in June 2005 when Harpers Ferry hosted the 2005 Niagara Teacher Institute. Sponsored by the park and the Harpers Ferry Historical Association, 19 area teachers spent the week of June 20 – 24 walking in the footsteps of the men who attended the 1906 Niagara Movement meeting. The Institute was designed to introduce teachers to the Niagara Movement.

The week began with a presentation by actor Fred Morsell. He is

best known for his depiction of Frederick Douglass. In preparation for the Niagara Centennial Commemoration Morsell is also developing a portrayal of the Reverend Reverdy Cassius Ransom's speech "The Spirit of John Brown." Ransom's speech was one of the most important addresses delivered during the assembly and helped to set the tone for the 1906 Niagara Movement meeting. Morsell shared his vast knowledge of both men with the teachers and helped them better understand each man's role in the African American struggle for freedom and equality.

Area leaders were an important part of the 2005 Niagara Teacher Institute. George Rutherford, James Taylor, and James Tolbert presented their research on John A. Copeland and Shields Green. Copeland and Green were two of the five African American men who fought alongside John Brown in his 1859 raid to end slavery. Arthena Roper and Bob O'Connor provided the teachers with an extensive background of the men and women who were involved in both the early civil rights movement and the Niagara Movement.

In 1909 the Niagara Movement became a part of the National Association of Colored People. To help teachers understand how the ideals of the NAACP translated into work at the local level, George Rutherford and James Tolbert discussed the history of the Jefferson County Branch of the NAACP.

Staff members from the park provided teachers with information regarding the Niagara Movement. Todd Bolton, Project Director for the Niag-

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ara Centennial, outlined the plans for next summer's commemoration. Rangers Kim Biggs, Catherine Bragaw, and Gwenny Roper each helped the teachers understand Harpers Ferry's role in the African American struggle for freedom and equality.

Dr. David Levering Lewis, who won the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Biography for his *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race 1868-1919*, spent an afternoon with the teachers via conference call sharing his

insights on Du Bois leading up to the 1906 Niagara Movement meeting in Harpers Ferry.

Dr. Douglas Smith from West Virginia University talked with teachers about the pedagogy of W. E. B. Du Bois. Dr. Mark Stern from Shepherd University discussed the motivations of people who participated in significant events in the civil rights movement.

Like Du Bois, who said following the Niagara Movement meeting at Harpers Ferry, "...one of the greatest meetings that American Negroes ever held," teachers who attended the 2005 Niagara Teachers

Institute felt that the week was very worthwhile and a good introduction to the Niagara Movement: Cornerstone of the Modern Civil Rights Era.

The Institute was presented by the Harpers Ferry Historical Association with financial assistance from the West Virginia Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. More information on the events of the Centennial Commemoration of the 1906 Niagara Movement can be found on the park's website: www.nps.gov/hafe/niagara.

From the President

I met with Anders Hendrickson, Chairman of the History Department at Shepherd University last week to discuss the potential for more interaction between the society and the college. We met at the Mary Tyler Moore Civil War Center on German Street where Mark Snell manages the Civil War Database activities, tours, and probably writes the lecture notes for the fascinating classes he teaches about the various wars in our

history. Shepherd University is the repository for the Robert C. Byrd archives and the Center for Political Research headed up by former historian of the Senate Ray Smock. Assisting him are the husband and wife team of Dr. David Hostetter, PhD in History from University of Maryland, serving as Director of Programs and Research for the center, and Suni Johnson, MA in History and Library Science, who will be the Archivist for the Robert C. Byrd Center at Shepherd.

We have initiated discussions about an internship program with the Society to be available for students of

the new Public History program that will start at Shepherd University in the Spring. Public History will incorporate training in archives, museum studies, historic preservation, archaeology, and local history. This is the kind of program I am sure our members will be keen to learn more about so stay tuned. The Board of Directors will be discussing cooperative efforts to improve the society's capabilities at our Board retreat on the weekend of October 15, 2005. As I have said before, all the e-mail addresses are printed here—so let us hear what you are interested in.

Historically yours,
Bill Drennen

Jefferson County Historical Society

Looking to the Future ... Preserving the Past

Please join us in perpetuating Jefferson County's monumental heritage

**Would you or someone you know like to join the
Jefferson County Historical Society?**

Name _____

Address _____

E-mail _____

_____ Annual Membership (\$15)

_____ Life Membership (\$150)

Annual dues can be sent after Jan. 1st each fiscal year to:

Membership Secretary
Jefferson County Historical Society
P. O. Box 485,
Charles Town, WV 25414



The Museum Corner

By Susan Collins, Curator
Jefferson County Museum

For many of us, small objects hold a special fascination. Almost anything one can think of has been reproduced at one time or another in miniature, both the useful and the useless, to entertain, instruct or simply to cherish.

Doll houses, or “baby houses” as they were called in the 18th century, were more the province of adults rather than children. The skill of the craftsmen who furnished these little homes was in-

credible, everything was made to scale from bed hangings to chamber pots, cupboards to candlesticks. The best of these houses, some created in the late sixteen hundreds in England and Holland, present a unique insight into the world of the minor aristocracy and merchant class of the period.

Beginning in the Middle Ages, apprentices, having learned their trade from a master-craftsman, had first to produce a small, to-scale piece of cabinetry known as a “proof piece” before acceptance into a Guild. Only if the result was approved, could the apprentice then enter into business for himself, and command a good price for his work.

The Museum is fortunate to possess an exquisite little chest of drawers, presented to us in 1990 by the late Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. McCormick of Charles Town. A piece of paper found in one of the drawers, bears a message written in crabbed hand-writing: “Little chest of drawers and box made for

Elizabeth Bell Wiggenton by old Mr. Minghini in 1849 or 1850”. Constructed of walnut with pine as the secondary wood, the chest stands on four delicately turned feet and measures sixteen and three quarter inches high and fifteen and a half inches in width. Four graduated drawers of dovetailed construction are fitted with brass knob handles and brass keyholes. The two lower drawers are provided with functioning locks, the upper drawers with false ones. The top drawer has a secret – it can only be opened by releasing a hidden catch. What a delight for a child!

The Minghini family lived in Smithfield, now Middleway, Jefferson County. At the time he built the chest, Samuel L. Minghini was forty-five years of age, and Elizabeth Wiggenton was five. Samuel’s little chest of drawers is in perfect condition; it has always been appreciated as an object of beauty: a loving gift for a fatherless little girl.



Upcoming Events and Other News

The 2005-06 **Jefferson County Historical Society Scholarship** has been awarded to Jefferson High School graduates and Shepherd University juniors Seth Fritts (on the left) and Justin Blanc (on the right).

This scholarship, created in 2002, supports students who ma-

ajor in history or related subjects and will benefit junior and senior level history or history education majors from Jefferson County who display financial need. The Society supports the scholarship through annual contributions.

“We feel strongly about supporting students who are studying history,” said William Drennen (in the middle), president of the Jefferson County Historical Society.”

The **Membership Meeting** is Saturday, November 5, 10 AM at Wright-Denny School in Charles Town. The subject of the presentation is as follows:

West Virginia is famous for its folk arts traditions but its heritage in the fine arts is comparatively unknown. This presentation will focus on early art and artists of the Eastern Panhandle and vicinity including both traveling portrait and landscape painters who visited the area as well as native artists including David Hunter Strother, David English Henderson, William Robinson Leigh and many more. This interesting topic will be presented by John A. Cuthbert, Curator and Director, West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University Libraries, Morgantown, WV.

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One copy of **The Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society** is mailed to each person holding a **PAID** membership. *Unfortunately, those members who are delinquent in their dues will not receive a copy of this publication. Please make sure that your dues have been paid and that the society has your current 911 address.* Until the publication of next year's magazine, members may purchase additional copies for \$6 each; order these from The Society, Box 485, Charles Town, WV 25414. Original volumes or facsimile reproductions are available to all persons at \$7 per magazine.

Other publications:

The Washington Homes of Jefferson County. \$10 mailed.

Michael D. Thompson, **Calendar and Index to Recorded Plats in Jefferson County, West Virginia (Virginia) Courthouse, 1801-1901.** \$25 mailed.

Between the Shenandoah and Potomac: Historic Homes of Jefferson County, West Virginia. \$45 mailed.

Burials in Jefferson County, West Virginia, 1978-97. \$18 mailed.

The videotape, **Between the Shenandoah and Potomac,** is also available for \$25 mailed.

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