

"Help Keep History Groups Going"

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By Mary Ann Ashcraft

Readers of this column surely know what the current economy is doing to cultural organizations nationwide. We've heard about cutbacks, layoffs and even closings of so many. Locally, the Historical Society of Carroll County survives with a reduced staff which operates fewer hours each week, so it is worthwhile to think about how we can support those organizations trying to preserve "Carroll's Yesteryears."

Dollars, plain and simple, are always welcome to keep the water bill paid and the lights on, but attendance is a statistic which gives an organization clout when it applies for grants or asks for financial help from other sources. How many people passed through the doors during the past year?

Have you visited the small museums run by the New Windsor Heritage Committee, the Mt. Airy Historical Society, or other community groups? Did you drop a little contribution in the jar which usually sits near their guestbook? Visitors not only bring in a handy extra bit of revenue and add to attendance figures, but they also let the volunteers who man museums, set up their exhibits and plan special events know how much their efforts are appreciated.

Each year at the end of June, the City of Westminster and the Pipe Creek Civil War Round Table organize the Corbit's Charge commemoration which is absolutely free. This year the event included someone impersonating Frederick Douglass, the famous abolitionist orator. Visitors to the site opposite the County Office Building could wander for hours talking to Civil War re-enactors, listening to music, touring craft exhibits and soaking up lots of history without spending a penny.

There are wonderful events which cost very little at the Farm Museum or the Shriver Homestead in Union Mills. I've benefitted from the knowledge of docents at both places plus the Western Maryland Railway Museum in Union Bridge and Sykesville's Gate House Museum - not just when writing a column for this newspaper, but when I had other questions as well. The Gate House also organizes fascinating history walks each spring which offer adults and children a chance to learn about such things as local copper mining or characters in Sykesville's early history. If we want these events to continue, we need to support them now in every possible way.

Perhaps you have been laid off from work but have a bit of extra time to donate while looking for another job. Your time and your talents could prove extremely helpful to an organization here in Carroll County which is trying to keep the past alive. If you are interested in family history, the Carroll County Genealogical Society maintains a large collection of local material at the Westminster Library available at no charge. Our libraries also provide access to Ancestry.com to help anyone searching for ancestors who lived elsewhere.

Volunteering, as I've found out since I retired, introduces you to delightful new people in the community. Marion Wright Edelman once said, "Service is the rent we pay for living." It is a wonderful reminder that we need to give something back to society, and there's no better time than the present.



Cockey's Tavern is a newly restored historic site in downtown Westminster and part of the Historical Society's attractive three-building campus. From the collection of the Historical Society of Carroll County.

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