

Carroll Yesteryears
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Serving Historical Society Supports Good Citizenship
By Jason Illari

In his 2020 revised essay *Why Study History*, author and historian Peter N. Stearns outlines eight essential reasons to study history. Contrary to what is often repeated as the primary reason — so we don't repeat the past mistakes—Stearns contends that history is much more than this.

Certainly there are events and decisions from the past that we should learn from in order to chart a new way forward. Yet Stearns argues convincingly that history can help individuals and communities in much more pragmatic and impactful ways. Avid history buffs would do well to check out his article posted on the American Historical Association's website using the keyword "Stearns."

As Executive Director of the Historical Society of Carroll County (HSCC), I have come to appreciate Stearns' stance that studying history is also essential for good citizenship. "Studying history encourages habits of mind that are vital for responsible public behavior, whether as a national or community leader, an informed voter, a petitioner, or a simple observer."

The term "community leader" strikes a chord as I observe the tireless volunteer leaders who have advanced the Society's efforts year after year since its founding in 1939. A 19-member Board of Trustees currently steers the organization's 12 committees composed of 65 active volunteers. An additional 35 volunteers support mission-related operations like assisting patrons with research, helping with special events and programs, giving tours, and planning educational outreach. Not only do these individuals give of their time to the Society, but they donate in other ways as well. They are leaders in our community. I am inspired by the spirit of sacrifice and comradery permeating HSCC and the community.

In today's changing world, HSCC and many other non-profit organizations are challenged to cultivate and retain volunteers. Some of this challenge stems from how volunteerism has changed over the decades, but focusing on volunteer purpose and appreciation can still attract volunteers to an organization.

One of the tasks assigned to the Society's new Outreach Committee is to more fully develop its volunteer program. Purpose and appreciation will be the catchphrase. Finding the right fit for volunteers within an organization can take some trial and error as the needs of the organization evolve and goals and objectives move up or down in priority. Whether service means greeting visitors in the Society's Bookshop, showing up for our summer campus cleanup day, serving on a committee, or helping patrons in the library, all are opportunities to play a part in advancing our mission in valuable ways.

My hope is that Carroll Countians will review the Society's upcoming Strategic Action Plan and reach out to me at jillari@hsccmd.org if they feel inspired to help accomplish its objectives. A

full listing of the Society's committees will be included in the final draft of the Strategic Action Plan that will be accessible on the HSCC website by mid-May of this year.

Challenging and exciting times are in store for HSCC over the next three years. Champions of history will continue to step up to volunteer because of their deep appreciation for history, the Society, and their community. I am extremely fortunate to be working alongside each and every one of you!

Jason Illari serves as the Executive Director of the Historical Society of Carroll County.