

Monroe County Historical Society

Recent Accomplishments, 2014-2016

Carriage House Museum This brand-new Gothic Revival style building was opened on Labor Day Weekend, 2014 and contains seven horse-drawn vehicles including a magnificent 1880's Omnibus in original condition. The building is a traditional timber-frame and is a museum piece in itself. The vehicles range from coaches to carriages to wagons and sleighs and represent a spectrum of vehicles once used in Monroe County. In early 2015, the exhibits were broadened to include carriage-makers' tools, horse tack and illustrations of late 19th Century transportation. This structure adds to our "museum campus" at the south end of Union and was funded with numerous small contributions as well as bequests, and was built primarily with volunteer help and encouragement from both town and county governments. The Carriage House has been featured recently in "Wonderful West Virginia" and "Blue Ridge Travel Guide." The Carriage House is located on Middle Street, just around the corner from our Main Street museums.



Caperton Museum This is our original museum and contains general exhibits, historic records and library materials. In 2015 we obtained funding for an AmeriCorps Member, Anita Tracy, through the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia. Her duties include organizing volunteers to welcome visitors, updating our museum displays and general maintenance of the museums. Her work allows our Society to present a professional front to the visiting public. Indeed, the Road Scholar program advertised four bus-tours to our museums in 2016. We are pleased to say that the PAWV funding was extended through 2016 and into 2017.

Log Houses Adjacent to the Caperton building are the Clarke-Wiseman House and the Owen Neel House. They are local buildings which were moved to the site in the early 2000's. They are beautifully furnished in early 19th Century antiques original to Monroe County. Recently a detailed catalog of these artifacts has been completed and this makes the collections so much more valuable and educational. Like the Caperton Building they are situated at the south end of Main Street, Union.



Ames Clair Hall This 1845 vintage church is available for concerts, lectures, meetings and weddings and has been well maintained over the years by the Society. In 2015 we added air conditioning and upholstery for the pews, and we extended the stage so that the grand piano could be moved to the side for non-musical performances. This was accomplished with the help of a \$10,000 bequest from the estate of Nancy White. We plan to encourage greater use of this facility in the coming years. The building is one block east of Main Street on Route 3.



Old First Baptist Church At the north end of Main Street is a building that was severely damaged in a “downburst” in 2006. Since then, the Society has put about \$110,000 into the church to replace the roof, to re-glaze the windows and to rebuild the front steps. This came with grant money from The W.V. Division of Culture & History, with Community Participation grants from the Legislature, and with matching funds from public donations. Last year, the electrical system was re-established and this year a local contractor has repaired the gutter system. The 36 foot tower, including a belfry and a steeple, was destroyed in the storm and this is still needed to restore the grandeur of this 1845 edifice.



So, the Monroe County Historical Society is a major landowner in the heart of Union and our buildings are all architectural gems. It would be fair to say that we are instrumental in preserving the heritage of one of the finest rural communities in southeastern West Virginia. In fact, the Society received the “Stewardship Award” from the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia at their conference in September, 2016.

Log Houses, Furniture & Accessories

The Historical Society owns two Log Houses, both of which were moved to the lot on Main Street adjacent to the Caperton Museum early in the new Millennium. The Clark-Wiseman House is in front and was moved, log-by-log, from South Street in Union, one half block away. This 1810 gem was scheduled to be bulldozed and replaced with low-income housing, but was saved by members of the Historical Society who were given three days to dismantle and move it! Even this was possible only because it was within the

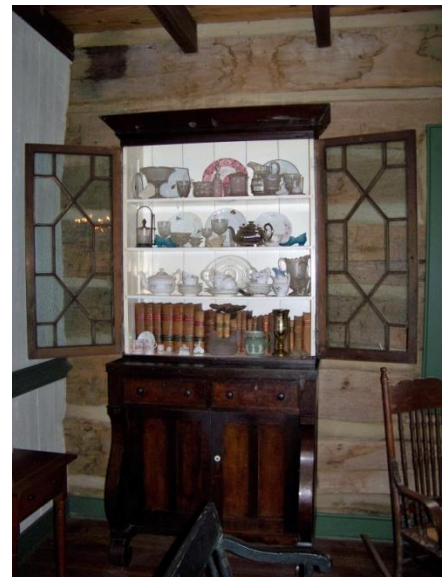
Union Historic District and a last minute effort by Mary Pearl Compton, a member of the House of Delegates, got an extension on the process. Substantial grant money was provided through the Intermodal Transportation Act to reestablish the building on Main Street.



The Clark-Wiseman House is typical of the very earliest structures when Union was established as the County Seat of Monroe. It is more formal than houses found in the surrounding rural areas and when the town was laid out in 1799, it was specified that each house be at least 16 x 18 feet, two stories high and be finished in a craftsman-like manner. By contrast, the Owen Neel House was built about 1790 in Gap Mills and was

donated by the Clark and Evelyn Hansbarger family. It started out with a single room and a loft, but later was extended horizontally and vertically to become a four-room, two story building with a huge chimney in the center of the building. This house was moved to Union, placed behind the Clark-Wiseman House, and connected to it by a “dog-trot” hall.

The job of furnishing the log houses naturally fell to Ron Ripley, an inveterate antique collector and expert on the 19th Century styles of the region. The result is a *tour de force* with objects ranging from furniture to books, pictures of early residents, kitchen utensils, bedroom quilts, woodworking tools and even children’s toys.





Altogether, there are 407 catalogued items, or sets of items, like candle sticks and chairs, so one could say that the houses are in ‘move-in’ condition! These furnishings were donated by Ron Ripley as well as a number of local families and virtually all of them were made and used in the Monroe County area. In addition there are five “fashion dolls” representing dress styles, from the 1810’s to the Civil War Period, and these were crafted and presented to us by local artist, Pete Ballard.

Some items have stories to go with them, like the Empire Style flat wall cherry cabinet with figured maple panels and two 13-pane doors, built for the Barnabas Johnson House in Johnson Crossroads. During the Civil War, hams and bacon were hidden in the cornice to protect them from marauding soldiers. In the kitchen one will find a walk-in fireplace with a sawtooth adjustable pot hanger, a crane as well as a large blacksmith-made rotating grill. The kitchen is where the technology and style of two hundred years ago has led to the biggest transformation in modern times. The combined Clark-Wiseman and Owen Neel Houses are truly the “jewel in the crown” of the Monroe County Historical Society.



Carriage House Museum & Exhibits

The Historical Society built this beautiful building in 2013-14 with volunteer labor and numerous financial contributions, large and small from Monroe County boosters, here and across the country. We designed it ourselves, from the graceful Gothic Revival Style proposed by Ron Ripley to the traditional timber-frame structure executed by our builder, Chip Sills. Not only is the building appropriate for the horse-and-buggy period but it is an exhibit in itself with genuine “hammerbeam trusses” on the inside and



Victorian frills on the outside. The beams have hand-cut, mortise-and-tenon joints, held together with wooden pegs, just like in days gone by. The antique 12-pane windows allow lots of natural light as well as outside viewing of the carriages when the doors are closed.

The pride of our fleet is an 1880's vintage “Omnibus” that brought summer visitors from the Allegheny Railway Station to Sweet Springs and the nearby Chalybeate Springs Resorts. It is a stagecoach-sized vehicle, manufactured in New York in the European fashion and brought to West Virginia to welcome visitors in real elegance. It may be the only one of its kind to survive in original condition and the Historical Society acquired it in 1968. However, there has never been a place to display this gem until we opened the Carriage House in 2014.



Also special to Monroe County are vehicles donated by Nancy White of Walnut Grove and these include a stylish Summer Rockaway Carriage, a utilitarian Mountain Wagon and a racy Portland Cutter Sleigh. These represent the high-end transportation scene and are all in good original condition. They sit on the left of the Carriage House while on the right are a buggy, a farm wagon and a surrey and these comprise the day-to-day working vehicles used on the farm and





to get into town. So, we are proud to say that our collection represents a real spectrum of the transportation scene around Monroe during the late 19th Century.

We are still acquiring carriage maker's tools, harness gear, vintage prints and drawings, and anything related to 19th Century transportation because it is rapidly fading into the past. In fact, one young boy approached the museum when we had just opened and asked, "What is a carriage?"

This technology was developed over the past 2,000 years and has been totally transformed in the 20th Century, making the development of the Carriage House an essential enterprise before carriages become relegated entirely to encyclopedias!

Also important to preserving our heritage is a book prepared by Fred Ziegler, "Carriages of Monroe County, WV." This book contains many vintage photographs of roadways that bring to life the buggies, carriages and coaches, and the people who rode in them. These pictures came from our museum and other institutions as well as individuals across the country who responded to our appeals in The Watchman for pictures from private collections. Mayor Caroline Sparks of Union was so proud of our accomplishments that she proclaimed August 30, 2014 as "Carriage House Museum Day" in Union, West Virginia!



Books, Family Records, & Photographs

Over our 53 years of existence, the MCHS has received many records pertaining to local history, but two Board Members stand out for their contributions to our library; Haskell Shumate and Dr. Ronald Ripley. Haskell was a founding member, and as County Clerk was well familiar with the advantages of the courthouse records. For our first quarter century he built our collections, especially books and genealogy records, and he left files on hundreds of local families. Over the past quarter century, Ron Ripley has also added many books, documents, as well as antiques, and at the same time has organized our two records rooms. Recently, Vernessa Pontius has tied all of this together with a spread sheet 21 pages long that lists these records by family name.

To give some idea of our holdings, there are 24 linear feet of books on the genealogy of individual families of local interest, and 24 feet of books on the history of the counties of West Virginia and Virginia. In addition there are 18 feet of Civil War books and 16 feet of history books on the Virginias. Family records, including photographs, are kept in special archival boxes and subtend 72 feet of shelves while there are 27 feet of files on family genealogies. Finally, another 72 feet of shelving contains books, pamphlets, ledgers, maps, and other records on local Monroe County, resorts, churches clubs and maps. We are currently considering several options for expanding our storage space to accommodate future acquisitions.

Members of the Historical Society have produced a number of publications over the last 26 years. Fifteen of these are based on diaries, letters, theses, or newspaper articles in our collections while five more rely on ledgers in the courthouse and still others are derived from outside sources. They include ten on villages across the county and eight on the county in general, while nine are devoted to the Civil War in this vicinity.

Of special note is the 1990 comprehensive work, "Cemeteries of Monroe County," by Haskell & Kathryn Shumate and Jay & Marty Banks. This survey has 508 pages not including the 64 page index. Also of interest is the Index to Morton's "History of Monroe County" prepared by John Allen and this 122 page work contains over 14,000 lines and perhaps twice that number of page references. Over the years, John has transcribed most of the publications that we offer and the Morton index transforms this monograph into a useful genealogical and historical research tool. Shirley Ulaki has contributed four major works to our offerings, including the 128 page transcription, "We the People of Old Monroe" and this is based on courthouse records. Finally, the 2014 "Carriages of Monroe County" by Fred Ziegler is the first to use the extensive photographic materials in our collections. Forty-four vintage photos are included, most taken in Monroe County.

Significant Dates in our History

1964 Historical Society organized by Maggie Ballard and Mary Pearl Compton.

1964 Indian Creek Covered Bridge on Route 219, 5 miles southwest of Union, was leased by the Society and restored in 1966. The bridge was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and transferred to the State of West Virginia in 1995.

1968 Omnibus purchased with the help of Monroe Co. school children. Built in the 1880's by the John Stephenson Co. of New York, this elegant vehicle carried passengers from the Allegheny Railway Station to the resort spas in the Sweet Springs Valley.

1971 Wood's Fort site (1773), Rich Creek Valley Rd., 4 miles northeast of Peterstown, was donated to the Society by John and Christine Allen. This site was the subject of a brief archeological study about 1990 by Stephan and Kim McBride of the University of Kentucky. Hopefully, their work will be continued.

1978 Museum at Old Rehoboth Church, 2 miles east of Union on Route 3, was constructed as a joint project with the United Methodist Conference. The Museum houses many Society artifacts.

1987 Caperton Building purchased on Main St., Union to house our office and museum. This was the 1820 law office of Hugh Caperton and later the Bank of Union. It contains our archives, books, and artifacts from Monroe County.

1992 Ames Clair Church on Route 3, Union was donated to the Society by Trustees of the United Methodist Church. This is an 1845 board & batten structure sold to a black congregation in the 1890's and restored by the Society. This building is used for quarterly meetings, concerts and may be rented by the general public.

1997 Old First Baptist Church, Main St., Union was given to the Society by the black congregation. It is an 1845 vintage Jeffersonian brick structure which was damaged severely by a "downburst" in 2006, extensively rebuilt by the Society in 2007-8 and is awaiting more work.

2000 Clark-Wiseman Log House was moved to its present site on Main Street, Union, adjacent to the Caperton Building. This 1810 Union town house is constructed of logs and is beautifully furnished with period antiques from Monroe County.

2006 The Owen Neel Log House, ca 1790, was moved from Gap Mills and attached to the rear of the Clark-Wiseman house. Both buildings are furnished with local antique pieces.

2014 Carriage House Museum completed on Middle St., Union, just around the corner from the Caperton Building. It contains our Omnibus and six other horse-drawn vehicles, and these represent a cross-section of work and pleasure-related vehicles of the late 19th Century.