

# Smyth County Historical & Museum Society

## Summer Newsletter

August/September 2015

As summer winds down, things are picking up at our museum: The Holston River Heritage Center, located in downtown Marion beside the Lincoln Theater. The main goal for the summers of 2013 & 2014 was to move our items into the new museum location. This summer our goal has been (and will continue to be) the unpacking of hundreds of boxes of books, pictures, magazines, newspapers and other items.

Once unpacked, we've cleaned as many as possible and have set up areas on the top two floors of the museum building for each category. We have a large area devoted to framed pictures. These show individuals from the county's history, buildings and homes in the area, clubs & civic organizations, military groups and even some pictures painted by local citizens.

We have another section full of old farming tools and early machines related to businesses popular in the area. We have looms, old beds & mattresses, chairs from the county court house, Victorian furniture, and a large selection of vintage

clothing, hats, wigs, glasses, and shoes. As you can tell from the front windows, we have a wide variety of military items and the military section of the museum is one of the most popular with our visitors.

Thanks to a core of dedicated volunteers, our unpacking process is in full-swing. Hopefully by Christmas we'll at least have all the boxes unpacked, but it will be a long time until everything is cataloged and put on the computer.

On our main floor we have added to the original displays and our Genealogy/Family History Room is getting organized.

### Special Numbers

321	Number of visitors since May who have signed the Guest Book
600+	Number of volunteer hours our members have worked since May
\$3400.00	Cost to replace 9 windows on the front of the building
\$35,500.00	Cost to replace the roof
\$650.00	Cost to tint the large display windows on the main floor

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As you can tell from the last three, maintaining a museum is expensive & we are working on getting grants to help.  
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### Events In 2015

- Hosted a Membership drive/party in April
- Hosted Marion College Alumni for a luncheon

- In June we heard local author Sharyn McCrumb discuss her book *Kings Mountain*
- Enjoyed storyteller Isaac Freeman in August
- Provided the venue for a DAR meeting
- We welcomed 3 new board members: Linda Burchette, Sam & Sarah Musick
- Agreed on a new logo for the museum created by board member Pete Mathena

### Upcoming Events:

September 27 at 2:00 – Joseph Lee from Abingdon will talk about local bottling companies & the history of Mountain Dew ☺

November 1st – 2:00 – Kathy Shearer will discuss her new book “Working with Stuarts” and sign copies

November 20, 21, 22 – The Christmas Market. Museum will be open to the public to view decorated Christmas trees and to watch the parade on the 22nd

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### **VISIT OUR MUSEUM'S WEBSITE:**

**SMYTHCOUNTYMUSEUM.ORG**

**THIS SITE WAS DESIGNED AND IS MAINTAINED BY OUR WONDERFUL MEMBER JIM PETERSON, WHO LIVES IN FLORIDA BUT HAS FAMILY CONNECTIONS TO THE AREA.**

Books for Sale: *Smyth Co. History Vol. 2 (Antebellum – Civil War)*. First Edition. by Joan Armstrong. \$35.00 at the museum.

*Marion & Hungry Mother State Park* by Ken Heath. Paperback edition. \$19.99. Sold at the museum.

**As we were unpacking boxes we came across many items that belonged to Clara Hill Carner, the founder of the Smyth County Historical Society and one of the main supporters of the creation of a museum. One of the best things she ever did was to write notes on the back of pictures and attach notes to items that she collected. In the space below, we will share with you selected parts of her autobiography, which was found written on the back of scrap paper in the bottom of a box.**

*"Record of My Life" (of interest only to me who has tried to live it) by Clara Hill Carner*

*My father was Dr. J. P. Hill, the first native dental surgeon of Smyth County who was born in Marion on Jan. 30, 1860. He died in Christiansburg on Feb. 14, 1925 at the age of 65 and is buried in Round Hill Cemetery in Marion, VA*

*My mother was Cannie M. Paxton Hill, born near Olympia in Rich Valley on April 15, 1865. She married on Feb. 21, 1883 and died in Los Angeles, Ca. on March 11, 1958. She is also buried in Round Hill Cemetery.*

*Clara Hill was born a few miles south of Chilhowie on Nov. 25, 1884. She married E. Dickey Carner on May 12, 1908 in Marion, VA.*

*Clara had a brother, Lawrence Young Hill, who was born near Middle Fork Baptist Church, east of Chilhowie. He died of cancer in Los Angeles on Nov. 22, 1963. He was cremated and his ashes are in California. He had been a stuntman in the moving picture business and was one of the original cops in "Our Gang" and also in Bob Hope's "Fancy Pants". He also played in "The Greatest Story Ever Told".*

*Another brother, John Paxton Hill, was born at their home in Marion on Jan. 25,*

*1900. He lived in Florida and was a general construction engineer during the construction of Cape Canaveral.*

*Her great grandparents were George William Hill, Mary Susanna Snavely Hill, Arthur Webster Paxton, and Nancy Rogers Snavely Paxton.*

*Clara graduated from Marion Female College in 1904. She became a teacher in schools in Smyth, Wythe, Pulaski, Montgomery & Augusta Co. She also was supervisor of rural schools in Loudoun Co., VA. She received her B.S. degree in education from Radford College in 1923. She spent 7 years in Asheville, NC as a member of the history department.*

*In 1929 she drove to California on vacation and to pick up her mother who was visiting her brother. Her mother became ill, so Clara resigned her teaching job to be with her. This was two weeks before the Stock Market Crash. She and her mother remained in Ca. for two years.*

*In Nov 1931 she decided to return to Asheville to her teaching job, but things were desperate there as well. The mayor of the city had borrowed thousands of dollars from a bank to pay teachers. The bank went bankrupt, the mayor committed suicide, and the bank president went to prison for several years. The city school board decided to only hire local teachers and Clara could not get a position.*

*With so many out of work, the federal government hired former teachers as case workers for the Welfare Dept. Clara was able to get a job in Asheville where she investigated cases and drove steep mountain roads "equal to a billy goat".*

*In 1934 she was transferred to Raleigh where she spent six months and then was transferred to southwestern Virginia where*

*her headquarters were in Abingdon and later Bland.*

*The WPA and CCC started to create jobs and her position as welfare caseworker was no longer needed, so she decided to return to Smyth County and teach. Her mother went to California to live with her brother, but died there in March of 1958.*

*By 1960 Clara is now alone. She has lost her beloved husband, as well as both parents and one brother. Clara and Dickey never had children, so to occupy her time she became involved in religious and civil organizations, such as the Holston Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.*

*She became founder of the Smyth Co. Historical Society in 1961.*

*More information in the winter newsletter, as her notes ended here.....*

### **Parting Information:**

**The museum will be open on Saturdays from 10:00 – 2:00 pm in September, October, and November.**

**Phone Number for the museum: 276-783-7286. We have an answering machine & will return your calls.**

**If you have friends or neighbors who would like to join the Historical Society, please pass along this newsletter and they can get in touch with us.**

**Have a wonderful Labor Day Vacation !**

**Anna Leigh DeBord  
President: SCH&MS, Inc.**