

Celebrating Sixty Years!



The DeKalb History Center held its 60th Anniversary Party on September 20, 2007. Over 200 people attended to celebrate the occasion and enjoy beverages and hors d'oeuvres. The Old Superior Courtroom was spectacularly decorated. The room's centerpiece of dessert towers was highlighted by four 20 foot "columns" draped with flowing white tulle. White lilies and roses were offset by greenery and pale pears. Modern furniture vignettes completed the décor with sleek white and upholstered pear-colored chairs.

We were privileged to receive welcoming comments and congratulations from some of our elected officials: The Honorable Vernon Jones, CEO of DeKalb County; The Honorable Kathie Gannon, DeKalb County Board of Commissioners and The Honorable Jim Baskett, Mayor Pro tem of the City of Decatur.

We were honored to receive a proclamation from US Representative Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr., which

stated that "over the past sixty years this stellar organization has given continuously to our community by preserving and exhibiting the artifacts and documents of our lives... and through the work of the DeKalb Historical Society, our community has been educated and strengthened, our lives have been touched, and our spirits uplifted." Therefore, the day was proclaimed "DeKalb Historical Society Day" in the 4th Congressional District by Hank Johnson.

Music was provided in our grand lobby by Jennifer Richardson of the Wood and Wind Chamber Players and in the Courtroom by The Clark Atlanta University Alumni Jazztet.

The audience particularly enjoyed the presentations given by our speakers: Mr. John Walter Drake and Dr. Eugene P. Walker, who highlighted historical

Continued on page 3



2007 DeKalb Heritage Festival

Nearly 300 children from three elementary schools attended the DeKalb History Center's Heritage Festival on October 5 to hear stories of life during the Civil War era, sample cornbread and biscuits cooked over an open fire, and make old fashioned toys to take home.

Students from Medlock Elementary, Glenwood Academy, and Clairemont Elementary schools braved the threat of rain in the morning to learn about history in this hands-on experience.

In her house, Mary Gay, played by Anne Earle,

recounted her daring exploits behind enemy lines to find food and clothing for the women and children of Decatur during the Civil War. The house was opened for the Festival by the Junior League of DeKalb County. Next door, Benjamin Swan-

Continued on page 2

Recent Grants & Donations:

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2007 Heritage Festival (cont.)

ton, played by Harry Stillwell, gave a tour of his home, showing visitors how the lady of the house captured a Yankee soldier and hid him in the attic. Leaving the Swanton House, students walked across to the Biffle Cabin where Fran Franz, as Confederate spy Nancy Hart, cooked up cornbread and biscuits over an open fire and talked about her secret work during the Civil War.

In the Barber Cabin, African American teacher Charlotte Forten, played by Valetta Anderson, recalled life as a free black woman before and during the Civil War, a time when neither women nor African Americans had many freedoms. She told of growing up in Philadelphia and going to South Carolina's Sea Islands to teach during the war. Under the trees, Calvin Sims, frontier storyteller, spun tales of the golden days of the American west and the contributions of the Buffalo Soldiers in the years following the Civil War.

Led by staff from the Decatur Recreation Center, students got to make their choice of three old fashioned toys: pinwheels, harmonicas, or yo-yos. Students quickly made and decorated their toy, but many found it challenging to get their yo-yo to return or to get sound out of their harmonica. Volunteer Bobby Hawkins was skilled at playing his harmonica and teaching students the art.

The Heritage Festival was made possible by the participation of City of Decatur Schools, DeKalb County Schools, the Decatur Recreation Department, Little Shop of Stories, and the Junior League of DeKalb County. Sponsors were A. S. Turner & Sons and the Decatur Downtown Development Authority. Generous support was also given by Decatur First Bank and Harry Stillwell.



Volunteer Bobby Hawkins assists schoolchildren with harmonicas

Archives Open House

The History Center's archivist, Paul Graham, opened the Archives for two extra hours on October 16 to give members and the public a chance to learn about the historical materials stored here. Visitors were able to browse through both the reading and the stacks rooms. Twenty people took advantage of the opportunity to explore the archives.

Paul rearranged the reading room in May, making the space more open and inviting.

This was the first time many people had seen the new configuration. For the Open House, Paul pulled significant items from the collection and put them on display. Some of these included the jail docket entry for Martin Luther King, Jr., a 1952 proposal map for an outer railway circling Atlanta, voter registration cards from before WWII, and registers of money orders issued at the Decatur Post Office from 1895 to 1900.

The stacks room was also open. Normally open to staff only, this room houses the most important archives collections. Some major changes to this room in the last few years were on display. The biggest contribution to the stacks room was made by the previous archivist, Katie Marages. She moved the biographical and subject files from boxes into a vertical file system. Also, the stacks room now houses tax digests and

60th Anniversary (cont.)

leaders from Decatur and DeKalb County.

Thanks to our volunteers and board members: Jon Manns, Kathryn Johnson, Ken Thomas, Bob Espy, Scotty Candler, Jack Regan, Paula Swartzberg, Albert Martin, Johnny Waits.

The event would not have been possible without our sponsors:

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Contributors to this issue: Melissa Forgey, Paul K. Graham and Jon D. Manns

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