

RIGHT NEXT DOOR: BLACK HISTORY MONTH AT THE MONROE - Herald-Times (Bloomington, IN) - February 5, 1996

February 5, 1996 | Herald-Times (Bloomington, IN) | Gena Asher

Many people have heard of Rosa Parks and are quite familiar with the biography of Martin Luther King, but how many know about Mattie Fuller or Preston Eagleson?

Monroe County African Americans are spotlighted at the Monroe County Historical Museum through February in an exhibit that honors Black History Month.

"We're looking at five areas, including childhood, religion, education, military service, work life and civil rights," said Maren Clause, guest curator for the exhibit and museum volunteer. "We used items from the museum's collection as well as from members of the community, who were generous in loaning us artifacts and pictures for the exhibit."

Elizabeth Bridgwaters was one of the people who let the museum officials copy photos from her large collection, Clause said. Her assortment of photos and clippings represents the Bridgwaters family members as well as other black families in Bloomington. Another resident, Suzanne Faulk, loaned her collection of African American dolls for the case which represents childhood.

"I spoke with many people in the community about history and family," said Clause, who moved here from Boston last fall. She said she enjoyed the opportunity to meet people in town and get to know the background of the area while on an assignment for the museum. "We realize when people loan things for exhibits, they are precious both in symbolism and as actual artifacts. When designing the displays, I wanted to make sure they were roped in such a way that the items were still easy to see and admire."

For instance, the display about Mattie Fuller features sheet music, an organ and a picture of Fuller. Trained as a beautician, one of Fuller's missions in life seemed to be to raise money for the Bethel AME Church by playing her portable organ on the square and other locations around town. One estimate quotes a \$13,000 donation to the church, thanks to her efforts.

Clause also placed placards describing each stopping point in the exhibit so that any visitor can view the offerings on his or her own. Also, there is a video available, "Martin's Lament: Religion and Race in America," which features local Second Baptist Church pastor E.D. Butler telling of his experiences. The award winning film, which was shown last spring on PBS, was co-sponsored by the Indiana Humanities Counsel and DePauw University.

The exhibit strives to show every day life through illustrations, photos and artifacts.

For example, the first black man to earn a master's degree at Indiana University, Preston Eagleson (Bridgewater's father) is featured in photo. Nearby, an exhibit features three cigar boxes and a photo of a man with a vanity-style dressing table.

Showers Brothers Furniture worker **Maceo Deal** figured out how to make furniture using a jackknife and cigar boxes.

Clause found mention of this, and some other stories and photos, in Shop Notes, the Showers employee newsletter.

While the baseball team pictures, World War I uniforms and school displays don't seem unique to black life, the civil rights era depicts the specific struggles against discrimination and persecution. The time line follows slavery, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan through to desegregation in the schools and the work of civil rights leaders.

"We wanted to use national events to set the scene for what was happening, then tell about the local people and how they were involved," said Clause. Though a museum exhibit can't tell a whole story, she hopes children and other visitors may be interested enough to find out more on their own.

"We moved the collection of black history books and children's books to the front of the gift shop section to show just some of the materials available," Clause said.

"I learned from my research in the community and at the county library's Indiana Room that there is a lot out there to read about to learn more. But it seems more relevant when you discover the local people and their involvement in historical events. My goal with this exhibit has been to show that."

The exhibit is underwritten by the City of Bloomington Human Rights Commission and Harry Stephens Olds Honda.

CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

Gena Asher, 'RIGHT NEXT DOOR: BLACK HISTORY MONTH AT THE MONROE COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM - Exhibit emphasizes local black history', *Herald-Times* (online), 5 Feb 1996 <<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.monroe.lib.in.us/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/1446E9416C4C58E8>>

© Copyright 1996 Herald-Times. All rights reserved.