

## It's History "Just for Kids"

*You're getting so much information for us that in the past we've had to search for over a number of years. Thanks to your efforts, the students will have an excellent perspective of their ancestors and community.*

City of Sidney elementary school teacher

Such comments help explain why Ohio's Shelby County Historical Society (SCHS) has been recognized as an institution that delivers excellence in its projects, programs, and publications, receiving eight outstanding achievement awards from the Ohio Association of Historical Societies and Museums since 1996. SCHS earned its most recent award in 1999 for JUST FOR KIDS, the culmination of a three-year partnership between the Society, area museums, local historians, and teachers in Shelby County, Ohio. This program was directly modeled after the National Register of Historic Places Teaching with Historic Places (TwHP) program. The Society owes a great deal to this organization for developing the concept of featuring historic places as resources for studying local, state, and national history.

### ***TwHP Provides the Blue Print***

Three years ago, the Society learned that proposed changes in the Ohio proficiency test could place a greater emphasis on local history as part of classroom instruction. Local schools asked for the Society's help in compiling relevant information. As a small non-profit organization staffed exclusively at that time by volunteers, SCHS looked to others for ideas on how to tackle this problem. I first learned of Teaching with Historic Places in the Ohio Historical Society's newsletter. Intrigued, I found the organization on the Internet and contacted them requesting more information. The material I received, including an outline for developing lesson plans and copies of printed lessons, ultimately provided the "blue print" for SCHS's own educational program.

### ***Working with Teachers***

Using a draft of the schools' Social Studies Course of Study (K-6), I developed a selection of local history topics, which then was reviewed by the Society's newly-formed youth committee and local educators. The final list of eight topics selected by teachers for production were: Black History, Canals, Civil War, Immigration, Indians, Industry, Pioneers, and Sidney's Downtown/Architecture. SCHS was then confronted with the daunting task of researching, writing, and producing guides for each topic to distribute to third and fifth grade teachers in the City of Sidney school system for the upcoming 1997-98 school year.

### ***History is Hard Work***

Using TwHP's printed lessons and instructions on developing lesson plans, I wrote and produced the first two guides on Sidney's downtown and pioneers. Volunteers David Lodge and Rich Wallace wrote the remaining guides and I served as editor and publisher. Our research efforts took each of us throughout the community and Ohio, combing the archives at various libraries (including the vast resources of the Ohio Historical Society), visiting museums and local landmarks, and talking with genealogists and area historians. Ranging from 36 to 60 pages, the guides averaged six weeks to produce—from research to final print/distribution to teachers.

### ***Different Content, Same Methodology***

While the content of our teacher's guides focuses on Shelby County's history, the style and organization closely follow the TwHP model. Using recommendations outlined by TwHP in "A Guide for Developing Lesson Plans," <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/guide.htm> each of the guides provides a historical overview, student objectives, the history of the topic, readings, visual materials, and exercises. Students are encouraged to "put it all together" by participating in community-based projects or activities. A recommended reading list and bibliography also are included.

The Society expanded the "places" concept of the Teaching with Historic Places program

*The author worked with a second-grade teacher to put together a historic building display. The teacher used information from the Sidney's Historic Downtown teacher's guide to develop a "listening center" for her students. Photo by Bonnie Seffrin.*

and incorporated people and objects relevant to Shelby County's history as well. SCHS's teacher's guides also are greater in length/scope than TwHP's lesson plans. The guides are written for use by K-12 teachers, so each guide includes support materials of varying levels of difficulty. Teachers can choose those activities that best match the abilities of their students and emphasize whatever part of the local history is relevant for the grade level of their class.

#### **Plans for the Future**

While the core part of the program has been the development and distribution of the guides to Sidney's schools, the next phase includes expanding the program to include each of the schools in Shelby County, eventually reaching all K-12 teachers. With the basic research published in book form, SCHS is also looking for new and exciting ways to deliver that content to students. Plans in progress include:

- converting the eight guides to interactive CD-ROM programs
- producing a "museum in a suitcase" for each of the eight topics, offering a combination of authentic and replica artifacts that match the content of the guides
- developing an educational speaker's bureau to speak to students in the classroom
- expanding the Society's web site, <[www.shelbycountyhistory.org](http://www.shelbycountyhistory.org)>, which currently contains more than 1,100 pages of local history information
- developing museum exhibits related to guide topics
- working with teachers to develop ways to incorporate local history into other educational areas such as art
- making supplemental teaching materials available such as slides, videos, photographs, and historical documents

In addition, my husband and I have created several educational outreach activities that feature material from the various guides. Intended to further bring to life the content of the guides for students, these activities have



included costumed presentations and the development of a brief video centered around the experiences of an 1800s immigrant as well as visits to an exhibit on local transportation with several hundred local fifth-grade students.

#### **History Has a Home in Shelby County**

To date, SCHS has secured more than \$25,000 in JUST FOR KIDS grant funds and has received numerous inquiries from other school systems that wish to develop a similar program. JUST FOR KIDS has significantly raised the organization's profile and continues to be very successful—not only in the schools, but also in the community—with the group raising the money to open its own museum and research center in January 2000. JUST FOR KIDS also earned a 1998 Leadership in Education Award from the Buckeye Association of School Administrators and a 2000 American Association for State and Local History award. Clearly, the Historical Society found the National Register of Historic Place's TwHP materials to be useful models for developing a framework for educational programs that are easy to modify and use by historians, whether on the local, state, or national level.

---

*Sherrie Casad-Lodge is a former Shelby County Historical Society (SCHS) board member and youth co-chairperson. She earned a Meritorious Award for Outstanding Community Service from the SCHS in 1998. She currently maintains the group's web site.*