



LEADERShip Ashtabula County Signature Class gains an understanding of our community's past on History and Heritage Day

CONNEAUT - The 2019 LEADERShip Ashtabula County Signature class spent October 24th learning the history of Ashtabula County through a guided tour, delving into the significant roles that many local residents played in the shaping of Ashtabula County, the State of Ohio, and our nation.

Through a combination of rich stories, recovered photographs and spirited narrative, Marianna Branch, Director of the Kingsville Public Library, along with avid local historian and attorney Richard Dana, Esq. and Michelle McClure of KeyBank, took the class participants on a journey around the county.

The group gathered at Conneaut's Kilpi Hall, now familiar to most as the Conneaut Arts Center, early in the morning. The hall is on the National Register of Historic Sites in America and is one of the few remaining examples of the Finnish Immigration in Ashtabula County.

Branch kicked off the morning with a deep look at the historical architecture that can be found in our area. From Federal and Italianate styles that were popular in the 1780's through the 1880's, to Gothic Revival in the mid-1800's to the Queen Anne style that carried through to the early 1900's.

From Conneaut, the group traveled to Kingsville's Simak Welcome Center to learn about the area's involvement in educational innovation and the various roles that area individuals played in the civil rights movement.

"I enjoyed the whole day, there was so much covered, from Architecture to our role in the anti-slavery movement but, I was surprised to learn that in the late 1800's Kingsville, Ohio was on the cusp of the modernization of school districts with the consolidation of the one room school house into one centralized building," class member Antoinette Green, Executive Administrative Assistant the City Manager in Conneaut said. "The 'Kingsville Experiment' permitted children from around the township to come together through the implementation of a system of transportation that would deliver them from remote areas to one building."

Lifelong area resident and Forestry Specialist with the Illuminating Company, George Emery III, was also struck by the amount of new information gained during History and Heritage Day.

"To find out that our area was the center of the 'free the slavery movement' just makes me more proud of the area," Emery said. "I realize now the diversity in the homes that are built in our area and I am amazed! I personally look at every home I cross a little differently now. I learned that my hometown of Kingsville Ohio was at the forefront of education."

After a tour and a live reading by Clssey Hubbard at the Hubbard House Underground Railroad Museum in the Historic Ashtabula Harbor, class members joined the Rotary Club of Ashtabula at Briquettes Smokehouse for lunch and two speakers.

Franco Perry of Ashtabula shared photos and stories of his work in the Ashtabula Harbor during the boom of industry and iron ore production, bringing back memories for those listening.

"While the speaker talked about the Huletts it brought back many memories of my Bappa (Grandpa) because he used to work at the Conneaut Docks with the Huletts," Emery said.

Tim Oddit, Headmaster of Grand River Academy in Austinburg also talked with the lunch gathering and shared some of the rich history of the academy.

Before wrapping up back in Conneaut, participants traveled to Jefferson Congregational Church where the sanctuary provided the backdrop for another round of rich historical storytelling from Dana. Charting through the amazing events of the late 1800's that

impacted the anti-slavery movement, Dana painted a picture that drove home some of the themes of the day that while difficult to do the right thing at times, one person can make an impact and ignite the spark of change.

Kent State Ashtabula Library Director, Amy Thomas, joined the group back in Conneaut to share the progress the Digital Commons project has made in preserving our area's history. As boxes of photographs are found buried in long-forgotten basements, Thomas and others have been scanning in photos and finding family members to interview.

Thomas and Dana also shared that one story in particular has resulted in over 10,000 downloads from 112 countries. The story of Florence Allen, first female state supreme court judge, has been very popular on the digital commons and continues to be of interest to a broad audience. You can find that story and more about the area at <https://digitalcommons.kent.edu/>.

The day left some speechless, like Emery, who learned so much about the area. "I cannot stop thinking that I have sheltered myself from our area and need to try better to raise my wonderful children with the knowledge of our awesome county," he said.

The LEADERship Signature class will meet again on November 14, 2018 and will be focusing on Agriculture in Ashtabula County. Find out more about LEADERship Ashtabula County happenings on our website: <http://leadershipac.org>

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