

The Appalachian Teaching Project 2009

Monongah, Marion County, WV: Exploring the history of coal, disaster, and community through the development of an interpretative concept for the worst industrial accident in US history.

The Frank and Jane Gabor WV Folklife Center at Fairmont State University

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Final Narrative Report

Monongah, Marion County, WV:

Exploring the history of coal, disaster, and community

Name of Project: _____ Grant Period: July 1, 2009– June 30, 2010

Grantee Name: Fairmont State University Project Director(s): Dr. Judy P. Byers/Noel W. Tenney

Description of Project:

Having previously determined that the development of a coal heritage center is a viable option for north central West Virginia, students gathered statistical data and explored site and educational exhibit options for an interpretive complex. The identification of local sites of historical significance and the study of the community dynamics of the coal era in Monongah, Marion County will aid in the potential development of a Monongah, WV Coal & Community Heritage Center. Monongah was the site of the nation's largest industrial accident on Dec. 7, 1907 when more than 300 miners were killed following an explosion in Mines 6 and 8. The diverse ethnic population and the community that developed has had a profound impact upon the culture of Marion County and north central West Virginia that is still felt today.

Students worked through The Frank & Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center, FSU, along with The Monongah Centennial Committee, Senator Roman W. Prezioso, Jr., and Mr. J. Davitt McAteer to explore the history of coal, disaster, and community in the town of Monongah.

Activities:

- Students enrolled in *FOLK 4401 – Folklore Applications*
- Students visited the Monongah historic sites including downtown, company houses, the church, mine portal site, and the cemetery, August 2009. This visit allowed the students also meet with a representative of the Monongah Centennial Local Planning Committee.
- Students conducted a town wide attitudinal survey asking residents to rate the importance of establishing an interpretive center in Monongah and how they might participate and support the proposal.
- Students created a model using photographs, research materials, interviews that were garnered at the Monongah site. Students also researched the coal mining museum interpretation from southern West Virginia and regional disasters.

Project Outcomes:

Students:

- *Completed a review of the literature and prepared an annotated bibliography on “the Monongah Story”. The annotated bibliography will be published on Mountain Lit & Life. (An online West Virginia literary and cultural reference website: <http://www.mountainlit.com>.)*
- *Conducted a survey and analyzed the results.*
- *Compiled a cultural mapping of the historical sites within Monongah and the surrounding area that are significantly associated with the coal community. Compilation will include relevant dates and events.*
- *Prepared a theoretical proposal for a Monongah Coal Community Culture Center utilizing a site of historical significance for the community.*
- *Developed a proposal for potential exhibits including a provided model for street signage noting historical sites in Monongah.*
- *Used a multi-media approach for presentation that engaged the audience in the life of the Coal Community of Monongah, West Virginia.*
- *Students created a poster and multi-media presentation concerning the proposed project that was shared with fellow members of the ATP and the ARC in Washington, D.C. December, 2009.*
- *Students presented their proposal on the campus of FSU, Spring 2010 during the Undergraduate Research Celebration. Representatives of the Monongah Centennial Local Planning Committee, including State Senator Roman W. Prezioso, were in attendance.*

Problems Encountered:

Because of the scope of the project, students lacked sufficient time to assimilate and analyze the complete spectrum of the content.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

This research project was a component of the Gabor WV Folklife Center’s continuing “Roads to Appalachia through Scotland/Ireland (2005), Italy (2007), England/Wales (2008), Eastern Europe (2010) travel/study/research abroad program (students who will continue this project have been chosen and will be traveling to Eastern Europe, July, 2010 where they will emphasize the Polish heritage of Monongah).

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Student presentations were well received and generated interest in other students to become future participants.

Continue funding this program so that other students may also have like experiences.

Attachments:

Budget Narrative
Invoice

Student participants:

Dena Jane Gilchrist
Arnold Triplett
Colby White