

White heads growing Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier Co.

By SANDY O'CONNOR
Observer staff

The Afro-American Historical Association (AAHA) of Fauquier County owes its creation to two daughters of Fauquier County: Karen Hughes White and Karen Lavore. Both women have deep family roots in the Piedmont area. The goal of the organization is to document, preserve and educate the public about the history of the Fauquier County region.

AAHA is headquartered in The Plains. It is open to the general public, schools and other organizations, interested in local history and tracing their family and community records. Its offerings include a resource center, a museum, a reference library, an auditorium and a genealogical library. AAHA also provides monthly public programs and community outreach services.

Karen White, the current AAHA president, speaks with great pride when discussing the difference AAHA has made and will continue to make in the lives of those using its resources. According to White, "Making connections, determining where we fit in, is a driving force that attracts people to AAHA."

White explained that finding their place in history satisfies a need many people find difficult to



Karen White is the president and one of the founders of the Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County.
Sandy O'Connor / the Bull Run Observer

ignore. People who come to AAHA and learn about their past can make the connections to influences that include African, Native and European Americans.

The museum's static exhibits are presented as a timeline of

American and Virginia history with highlights of Fauquier African-American presences and contributions. The museum itself features two levels of exhibits on local, regional and national African-American history. Originals

and copies of family photos abound throughout the museum. The museum actually contains a 150-year-old iron cage from the slave ship *Veronica* and will soon contain an authentic loom, which is being rebuilt piece by piece in the basement of the museum.

The library and archives maintain collections that include works of art, historical photographs, clothing, ceremonial items, rare books, everyday objects, documents, oral histories and memorabilia.

The museum has come a long way since it was created in 1992. However, White enumerated several things AAHA still needs, such as increased staff. AAHA currently works with a skeleton crew. In addition, White would like to expand AAHA's educational programs.

Teachers and students alike make use of the museum's resources; in White's opinion, the resources are underutilized. The museum, alone, would serve as an excellent educational resource that could involve research and study at all age levels. The museum houses documents, regarding runaway slaves, slaveholders, burial grounds, family folders and local historical sites.

Finally, White would also like to purchase a microfiche reader-

scanner. It would be a wonderful addition, she explained, because AAHA is constantly gathering information that could be better filed with microfiche.

White eloquently cited the current accomplishments of the Fauquier County AAHA as helping people learn of "the richness of the history which Fauquier County holds in the palm of its hand." She spoke with some excitement when she described museum visitors who had never explored their backgrounds and were rewarded with a new sense of intrigue and empowerment.

She went on to say that, when they traced their roots, they realized their own strength and found power to move on and begin to teach their own descendants a proud heritage.

In speaking of AAHA, White talks about "creating a bridge between the races through research and investigation. She concluded by saying, "It goes beyond color; and, for that reason, there is a great need for our services."

AAHA of Fauquier County, at 4243 Loudoun Ave. in The Plains, can be reached at 540-253-5126 or by visiting www.aahafauquier.org.

Editor's note: This reporter participates in Fauquier County AAHA outreach programs.