

Appalachian College Association Student-Faculty Research Grant

Follow Up Report

Project Title: The African American Community of Watauga County North Carolina

Project Director: John Scarlata, Professor of Photography at Virginia Intermont College

Students: C.J. Julian, Dawn Gibelyou

Grant Period: July 1, 1996 to December 31, 1996

Project Description:

To photographically document the small and culturally isolated African American community in the Southern Appalachians of North Carolina. This project will include audio tape recorded interviews with members of the community. The final project will be in the form of an exhibit of photographs with statements from the community members. The exhibit will also be prepared as a Web Page to be viewed on the Internet

Research Project Details:

Starting in early July of the grant period Dawn Gibelyou and myself started to interview members of the community. These early interviews were with the leaders of the community and were for the purpose of making lists of names, addresses and telephone numbers. During the remainder of the summer Dawn and I made phone appointments, scheduled interviews, and made photograph of the people, the homes, and church's. Both Dawn and I got involved in community affairs, and spent many days helping with the re roofing of the Boone Mennonite Brethren Church. When time allowed we brought back photographs to share with those photographed their friends and family. These early contacts with the community were helpful in gaining trust for ourselves and

the project.

When classes resumed in late August of the grant period , C.J. Julian began working with us on the project. During the remainder of the grant period interviews and photographs were done on weekends. This placed a limit on the work for much community activity takes place during the week.

During the first week of the Fall semester I recruited two more students for the project, Rebecca Easter and Fatma Khamis. Both Rebecca and Fatma worked for a period of time on the project but due to other responsibilities had to drop this work.

Photographing and interviewing in the community took on a new direction from about mid September on. The new approach was begun by Fatma and seemed successful. We simply walked around the community talking to people, and knocking on doors. The results were surprisingly good; we were seldom turned down for an interview or a photograph. A second approach included attending the Boone Mennonite Brethren Church during Sunday service to meet people and share photographs with others not photographed This enabled us to photograph the Women's choir and the gospel group The Gospel Gems.

During this same period the project included research on the Internet and in the library. This research was on African American communities in the rural South ,in Appalachia and North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

Since the Watauga community is predominately Mennonite, the research included the

Mennonite religion and communities. Work began on printing contact sheets work prints to share with the members of the community, editing the work for exhibition, printing final images for exhibition, matting and framing. Chris Stewart a graduate of Virginia Intermont Colleges's Photography Department was contracted to do a workshop for the group on designing and producing web pages. C.J. Julian took on most of this responsibility, with the group making all of the design decisions.

Results;

The research is complete, that is the field work of photographing and interviewing has stopped. The printing and finishing of the photographs is complete with an exhibit of the work to be installed at the Virginia Intermont College Photography Gallery on January 21, 1997. The Web Page is nearing completion, the final format, design decisions and text is still in flux but it should be up and running in February 1997. An exhibition date is being worked out with the Watauga County Arts Council for the Jones House Community Center in early 1998. Other exhibition venues and publication is being looked into.

Benefit to Students:

The benefit to the students is obvious. During the grant period both students had an experience which was unique in the normal setting of undergraduate liberal arts education. Extended research and work on a single project with out the restraints and

demands of a normal college course allowed the students professional activity not

otherwise available. Being part of a team whose responsibility included all aspects of the research, exhibitions and Web Page also allowed for a unique experience. The work which was accomplished for the grant will become an important part of the students portfolio. This portfolio will be their key to graduate school and or professional activity in their chosen field of documentary photography.

Future of the Project:

Although the grant period and funding is over Dawn Gibelyou and I continue to interview and photograph in the community. The grant allowed us time travel and materials to get involved with this community. The work is stimulating and rewarding as are the personal relationships that have been formed by this process. We hope to continue to work on this project for at least another year. This will give us time to collect an outstanding body of work which will have a greater possibility of publication and continued exhibitions. All of this will have a greater impact on one of the initial reasons for the project that is to give greater exposure to an unrecognized part of the greater Appalachian community.

WEB SITE

[WWW.VIC.EDU/PHOTO/DOCUMENTARY PROJECT](http://WWW.VIC.EDU/PHOTO/DOCUMENTARYPROJECT)