

The Creation of the Susan Arthur Historical Preservation Award

By Connie Danner

There are several awards hanging on the wall of the Knox Historical Museum. Among them is a new one in honor of the late Susan Arthur created by GFWC/KFWC Junior Woman's Study Club and presented this year during the Daniel Boone Festival. It is in recognition of her many efforts in the preservation of Knox County history.

The Susan Arthur Historical Preservation Award was presented for the first time 2 October 2006 during the festival's Royalty Coronation at Knox Central Middle School gymnasium. Susan herself valued the work of other historians and so the Award is designed with the intention of annually adding to the plaque the name of a local historian who has made significant contributions to Knox County history. Charles Reed Mitchell is the choice this year.

The 59th Daniel Boone Festival has come and gone. It is a festival that celebrates our life as a community. The Festival itself has a rich history of hard work, planning, and wide participation on the part of people who really care about our life together in Knox County. Every year in October the Ferris Wheel turns and turns bringing in view scenes of people hurrying about munching fried apple pies, pushing baby carriages and wheel chairs, scenes of people who haven't seen each other for some time standing around and visiting about both old times and yesterday, scenes of people selling their crafts or showing off beautiful quilts hoping for a prize.

There are many festivals in our mountains but the Daniel Boone Festival has a golden thread of history running through it that makes it enduring. Daniel Boone was real after all and so was Thomas Walker, as were the Cherokee who signed the first Cane Treaty. And so was Susan Arthur who told the children about them all year after year at the annual picnic given at Walker Park for all the candidates for the Daniel Boone Festival Royalty Coronation sponsored by Junior Woman's Study Club.

To the candidates organizing in three age groups, Susan told stories of heroes, of courting customs, of the way life was in the



Daniel Boone Festival poster of Susan Arthur as "The Story Lady," with Wanda Smith Huesing and daughter Christina Huesing

old days of Knox County, and fascinated, the tiny candidates listened and so did the older girls each hoping she would be crowned Festival Queen. Susan, a long time librarian at Barbourville City School, was superb story teller.

"It just was not the same this year," said Rita Wood, president of the Study Club. You see, Susan died last year. The Club wanted to do something to celebrate and preserve the gift of story Susan had given so many young Knox Countians for years at school, at the Knox Historical Museum, at the celebrated Daniel Boone Festival. She was present for story telling even at the very end when she was 90 years old.

Once the Junior Woman's Study club has an idea it doesn't go away. Their motto is "improving our community" and their bountiful energy does it, project after project. They partnered with tourism and the city to raise funds for playground equipment at City Park. They not only know children need to play, they know children grow up and many have to go off to war, so when the men from our national guard unit were called up and went to Mississippi to train for deployment to Iraq,

the club got wind of a yearning for Grippio Potatoes Chips, not to be found in Mississippi, and the women sent six cases, 106 bags of them to our soldiers. Women with big hearts and generous pockets!

As they pondered a way to remember Susan Arthur's life among us, they decided preservation was the key word. They wanted to preserve that golden thread of history that runs through our annual Daniel Boone Festival, that runs through the work at the Knox Historical Museum where Susan was president for many years, that always ran through her wonderful stories.

So The Junior Woman's Study Club established the Susan Arthur Historical Preservation Award to be given annually in the form of two plaques: one to the person they choose to honor as following in Susan's steps and preserving our history and another plaque to be inscribed with that person's name each year and kept on display at the Knox Historical Museum.

Their choice for this year is Charles Reed Mitchell, Susan's successor, president of

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Susan Arthur Historical Preservation Award

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the Knox Historical Museum, editor of *The Knox Countian*, a Lifetime Director of the Daniel Boone Festival. Susan would have clapped her hands in approval!

Club President Rita Wood read the following explanation for Mitchell's being named the first recipient of the Susan Arthur Historical Preservation Award:

**Charles Reed Mitchell,
Keeper of History in Usable Form**

Charles Mitchell is a native Knox Countian, having lived for many years in Barbourville in the family home on South Main Street, which as a boy he remembers being called River Street. His history among us is long. Barbourville City School is his school and Union College is his undergraduate college. Throughout all these years his encyclopedic mind has stored people, places, events, and impressions as he has walked our streets and mingled among us. In return for the life in the place he calls home, he has preserved our history in substantial, usable forms. He not only knows our history from the inside but has taken care in his mind to place it in historic context from association and mentoring with well-known historians such as William Sherman Oxendine, for whom a room in our museum is named, and Thomas D. Clark, the famous Kentucky State Historian.

We will be grateful to Charles Mitchell for his many activities and contributions to the shaping and preserving of our history, but a few examples will suffice to stand for the whole:

1. He has for many years been a hard working member of the Daniel Boone Festival Committee and as such has edited the Daniel Boone Festival Program Book and worked to secure reenactors, such as Scott New as Daniel Boone himself.

2. As part of the Festival each year, Charles provides a program of the original Mitchell Local Newsreels, the first original screenings of which was in 1939. The festival screenings will mark a nineteenth year



Rita Wood presents the first Susan Arthur Award to Charles Mitchell.

this year. They are always widely attended. The original advertising slogan was "See Yourself in the Movies." People still love to see themselves in them, though now they themselves are many years older.

3. Since the death of Susan Arthur, Charles has been President of Knox Historical Museum. But that is relatively recent history. He has been a major part of the museum for a long time, becoming involved shortly after its beginning. He is responsible for encouraging the new Genealogy Division of the museum following the large donations of the Knox County Genealogical Society and Hermine Brinkmeier collections. Visitors to the museum find in Charles and the docents a wealth of information and real help from the D.A.R. volunteers with genealogy work.

4. One of Charles Mitchell's major contributions to local history is his editing of the comprehensive book, *Knox County, Kentucky: History and Families*, an invaluable resource.

5. Perhaps, his most important permanent contribution to the preservation of the history of Knox County will be his years of editing *The Knox Countian*. His research is meticulous, his editing judgments sure, and his choice of subjects widespread—everything from alligators in Knox County to fire departments. Finally, the mark of a scholar, the whole is completely indexed.

Charles Reed Mitchell is truly a keeper of history in usable form.

Museum Additions

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Rev. Chiles collected local history as well and either copied by hand or ordered to be copied a number of important sources that existed at the time only in manuscript. A "History of the Barbourville Baptist Church," handwritten on legal paper and rolled like a scroll, is part of the collection, along with a notebook containing a hand-printed copy of Elmer Decker's "History of Knox County," chapters 1 and 2, plus excerpts. Two copies of the 1979 revision of the 1966 First Baptist Church pageant, "Unity Appearing Among Us" are also in the collection. A few vintage photographs of the building and church members from the early years of the North Main/High Street church were also included.

To demonstrate that the Chiles talent has continued to the next generation, Shirley Chiles Humphreys also gave the museum a CD recording, *Sounds for Sweethearts* (2004). Shirley plays nineteen piano standards of the 1940s and 50s with a polished touch, making for a most relaxing hour of pleasant melodies.

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