

David and Betty Cole Win Susan Arthur Historical Preservation Award

By Charles Reed Mitchell

For the first time, the Susan Arthur Historical Preservation Award has been granted to a couple, David and Betty Cole. GFWC/KFWC Junior Woman's Study Club President Kim Wilburn presented the award to Mr. and Mrs. Cole on October 5, 2009, describing them "a husband and wife team who has worked very hard to preserve and promote Knox County's heritage and history." The presentation was made at the Knox Central Middle School gymnasium as part of the club's continuing Presentation and Coronation of royalty (begun in 1962) at the 62nd Daniel Boone Festival.

The Coles are the fourth recipients of the Susan Arthur award, created in 2006 to honor the late president of the Knox Historical Museum and official storyteller at the study club's annual picnic for royalty candidates. The award acknowledges the individual or individuals who have made significant contributions to the preservation of local history, traditions, historic sites and other forms of this region's cultural heritage.

David Cole's major contribution was cited as the creation of the Knox Historical Museum, of which he was the primary founder in 1987. Betty Cole is the head of tourism in Knox County and the major mover and shaker responsible for the creation and development of many Barbourville and Knox County historical parks and educational projects, most prominently the Battle of Barbourville Civil War Interpretive Park and the town's historical murals.

In presenting the award, Mrs. Wilburn listed their most significant contributions to the growth of community history.

David Hayes Cole was born in 1950 to Sam and Joyce Cole. He was raised in Barbourville, first in a home owned by Charles and Mattie Hayes Cole across from current Pope Lumber on old 25-E and then in Apple Grove. He attended Knox Central all 12 grades. He then went on to graduate from Eastern Kentucky University. He worked at the Barbourville Mountain Advocate for many years rising to the post of editor before becoming the Public Relations Director for the Knox County School District in 1995.



Kim Wilburn presents the 2009 Susan Arthur Award to Betty and David Cole

He was on the original board of directors of the Knox Historical Museum, which was officially dedicated on October 9, 1988. He was one of the major founders of the museum and served as its president for the first few years. He worked with Mayor Phillip E. Conley to acquire space for the museum on the second floor of the City Hall building and with Charles Black on the display cases from the former Corner Drugstore. Among others who helped David establish a Knox County museum were Sherman Oxendine (author of "A History of Barbourville, Kentucky"), Jeanne Suchanek (Kentucky Historical Society advisor), Carnell Sprinkles (then Knox County Judge Executive), and K.S. Sol Warren (author of *A History of Knox County, Kentucky*).

According to the transcript of the museum dedication, ¹ Sherman Oxendine stated, "David Cole took the bull by the horns and did it.... If it hadn't been for David Cole, there would be no museum. I've never seen anyone work so hard and conscientiously as he did." Oxendine then defined the mission of the museum: "The purpose of the museum is to preserve a way of life, the culture of a people, in this case, Knox County people. It is to make us who are here today aware of who we are by looking back, by

looking back at those who came before us."

David Cole has always been a firm believer in this statement as he has worked diligently on many projects to promote and to preserve Knox County's heritage and history.

Betty Smith Cole was born in 1951 to Claude and Ethel Smith of Hammond, Kentucky at Cole's Branch. She attended Jackson Elementary for six years and then Dewitt Elementary for two years, graduating from Knox Central High School. She is one of ten children, all of whom helped out on the family farm. Betty became the Arts, Crafts, and Tourism Director at Kentucky Communities Economic Opportunity Council (KCEOC) in 1993. She organized several "Old Timers" Festivals while working there. In 2006 she began working full time as Tourism Director for the City of Barbourville.

Betty was as much a force in creating the Battle of Barbourville Civil War Interpretive Park as David was in founding the Knox Historical Museum. As soon as historical research proved beyond question the location of the Battle of Barbourville, Mrs. Cole secured funds for a memorial park and

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made arrangements for locating it on the actual battlefield. She also headed a committee which arranged for the creation of Civil War murals on three sides of the battlefield property.² Other huge murals depicting vanished buildings and people of Barbourville a hundred years ago and scenes of quilting were also funded and completed under her leadership, as well as a small park on Sevier Court decorated with quilt patterns.

Betty has had remarkable success in achieving other grants for historic and civic projects in a time of tight funds. She ap-

plied for and received a grant from the Kentucky Heritage Council to be used toward the restoration of the historic Hiram H. Owens house downtown. From the Southeast Kentucky Tourism Development Association (SEKTDA) she achieved the "C.I.T.Y." Grant of \$50,000.00 for Barbourville in 2007 and was also awarded smaller grants for a city awnings program and a "Let's Paint the Town" decoration program.

She serves as president for the Redbud Festival and Quilting Workshop, a four-day event annually held at Union College which attracts people from all over the United States. She coordinates the many facets of the festival and arranges all the events. Betty has also been instrumental in the success of the Appalachian Quilt Trails Project in Knox County, the Kentucky Bluegrass Spring Nationals (a lawn mower race), and the Women in Business Luncheon workshop. Along with participating in numerous public service committees, she currently chairs the First Frontier Corridor tourism program and the Eastern Highlands Matching Funds Program, as well as

serving on the board of directors for Knox Partners and the Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association.

The Coles were presented a plaque naming them the 2009 Susan Arthur Historical Preservation Award winners, and their names were added to a second plaque which hangs on the Reception Room wall in the Knox Historical Museum.

Previous winners of the Susan Arthur Award are Charles Reed Mitchell (2006), K.S. Sol Warren (2007) and Michael C. Mills (2008).

NOTES

1. For a transcription of the dedication ceremony speeches, see "October 9, 1988: The Day the Museum Opened," *Knox Countian*, 10: 3, Fall 1998.

2. See "Barbourville Civil War Interpretive Park Opens," *Knox Countian*, 19:3, Fall 2007.

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