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HISTORIAN AXED

On Wednesday, December 9, I received a call from Legislator Ted Swiercznski stating that the Orleans County Legislature had, during a budget committee decided to eliminate the Orleans County Department of History. He further stated that they thought it could be incorporated into Veterans Services with no remuneration for the head of that department. He also indicated that he and Richard Bennett were against this action. Following this I called Frank Berger, the chairman, who indicated that it was being done to cut back on the overall county budget. (State law requires that the county appoint an historian but it sets no guidelines.)

I told Chairman Berger that if this cutback was being done as some form of retaliation against me that I would sooner resign as County Historian rather than see the demise of the History Department. He assured me that it was being done out of necessity to cut back on the county budget.

The Department of History net county cost for 1992 is set at \$5,487.00. The breakdown is as follows: Personal Service \$4,145, telephone \$500.00, Insurance \$40.00, Employee Benefits \$802.00. This is after my budget was reduced from \$6,970 in 1991. Therefore, in 1992 I've had no travel expense, no postage, no printing budget, no office supplies and no other contractual (history markers). Therefore, I've had to take postage, travel, printing and office supplies out of pocket not to mention that I also took a \$550.00 decrease in 1992 pay.

Orleans County has had an historian since May 1934. The historians have been in order: Katherine Rowley, Theta Hakes Brown, Joseph B. Achilles, Cary H. Lattin, Arden McAllister, and yours truly C.W. Lattin since January 1, 1979.

To make no mention of eliminating this department before or during the county budget hearing Monday evening, December 7, is at least unfair and sneaky. I attended the meeting and not one person stood up to make any mention of the Department of History budget as being out of line.

As County Historian I have written over 700 weekly columns which have appeared in the local papers and Pennysaver during the past fourteen years. I would add here that my mother Avis Lattin has typed all of them as well as other correspondence for me during the past fourteen years i.e. the county has had her voluntary service.

One of the duties of any municipal historian is to interpret their local history. In fact, that is a priority which I have always tried to accomplish.

As historian, I compiled a book in 1984 entitled "Architecture Destroyed in Orleans County" and more recently, written a book entitled "Luminaries in the Firmament", both of which were published by the Cobblestone Museum because there was no county money available. I also produced a brochure on the Historic Court House District in 1989 with support from the America The Beautiful Fund. This has been an aid to local tourism as I often give guided tours of the district.

I have lectured to civic, church, school and senior citizen groups on various topics of historical interest. As historian, I have tried to bring to public attention our rich heritage through historic markers. In my writing and speaking, I've often selected topics of an aesthetic nature that give a flavor of times past. I have certainly tried to accommodate groups which have asked me to speak or local individuals who have wanted information. I am frequently asked to lecture outside the county and I often assist people in doing research.

The Orleans County Department of History holds files of old photos, clippings and other archival material which I use to interpret local history. There is also a small library of books dealing with local history.

The photo which accompanies this article was taken last week at a book signing for "Luminaries in the Firmament" in Brockport. Shown with me is Dr. James Orr, center, the photographer and to the left, Valarie O'Hara Murray who wrote the Foreward, from Pike Stained Glass Studios in Rochester. Here is a quote from the Foreward: "I met Bill Lattin several years ago through his wonderful lectures and articles on stained glass. Because he is the only county historian I know, I assumed that all county historians held the same interest in architectural history and art, not realizing how lucky we are that he is the exception."

I will no longer be historian ending December 31, 1992, but if you feel it is important to maintain the Orleans County Department of History, please contact your county legislator either by phone or in writing or register a complaint at the County Legislatgure chambers at 589-7053.