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IWU Professor Wins Award for Museum Exhibit

October 4, 2006

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Pamela Muirhead, associate professor of English at Illinois Wesleyan University, is a guest curator for "Presence, Pride & Passion, A History of African Americans in McLean County," on display at the McLean County Museum of History, 200 N. Main St., in Bloomington. The exhibit, which opened on Feb. 4, 2006 and continues through May 25, 2008, received a Superior Achievement award from the Illinois Association of Museums.

The Superior Achievement award recognizes "groundbreaking" projects, which can serve as models for the profession and attract a wider audience than is normally reached by an institution. It is non-competitive, but includes evaluations by professionals in the fields represented by the subject matter.

Developed by the McLean County Historical Society in partnership with the Bloomington-Normal Black History Project and sponsored by The Illinois Humanities Council the Mitsubishi Motors of North America, "Presence, Pride & Passion" celebrates the contributions the black community has made to McLean County since its establishment in the 1840s. In a letter to the museum, Illinois Association of Museums coordinator Mary Turner praises the exhibit's "excellent" community involvement and the "strong voice" individual oral histories provide.

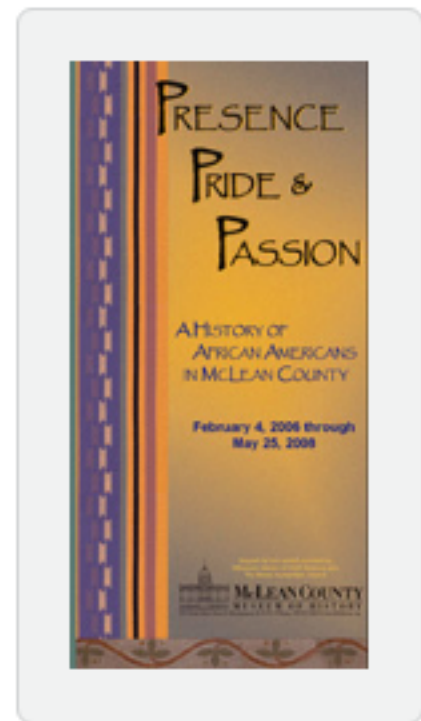
As guest curators, Muirhead and her husband Jack (IWU class of '62) worked closely with Susan Hartzold, exhibit designer and curator for the museum, in selecting the pieces to be presented. The Muirheads have been historians for the Bloomington-Normal Black History Project for over two decades and have provided much of the research for the exhibit, which they are currently using to write a book.

Pamela Muirhead, who earned a bachelor of arts degree from IWU in 1968, a master of arts degree from Northwestern University in 1972, and a doctorate from the University of Illinois in 1981, joined the Illinois Wesleyan faculty in 1972. She was honored as the IWU Century Club Honoree in 1988-1999 and served as acting dean of faculty in 1992-1993.

"Presence, Pride & Passion" is a collection of documents, photographs, letters, historical text, oral histories and objects such as household items, family heirlooms, and military medals. Also included are paintings and archaeological artifacts from Wayman African Methodist Episcopal Church. Wayman AME Church has remained in operation since its founding in 1831, making it the oldest African American church in the Bloomington-Normal area.

Community celebrations, business ventures and cultural changes, such as clothing and hair styles, are also represented in the exhibit. "One photograph includes a group of IWU students, including a former member of the Illinois Wesleyan Board of Trustees, wearing the 'afro' hairstyle," says Muirhead. All of the exhibit materials were collected from community members by the museum and donated to the Black History Project.

For additional information, visit the McLean County Museum of History's Web site at www.mchistory.org, or call the museum at (309) 827-0428.



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