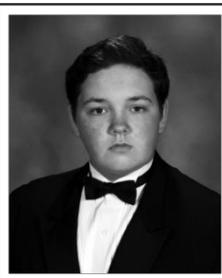


WINNING ESSAY FROM HANCOCK COUNTY YOUNG HISTORIANS

John Gillette, a senior at Hancock County High School, is an honorable mention of the essay contest sponsored by Hancock County High School and the Hancock County Historical Society. The essays are written by members of the Young Historian Club. John Gillette is the son of Alan & Becky Gillette.



John Gillette

History within a house

My grandfather's house had always been somewhat of a family museum. Odd and ends, antique furniture, priceless artifacts and dime store trinkets all mixed together in a chaotic display. It always seemed to work for him somehow. Many of the pieces of furniture he used in his daily life were over a hundred years old, and yet somehow seemed more sturdy and reliable than anything I'd seen in a furniture shop. But it was always just my grandfather's house. It wasn't until a few months ago, when he decided to move into an apartment in an assisted living community, that I truly realized what had been there all those years.

A few weeks later my father approached my brother and I and asked for our help. He knew that the task of retrieving the antiques, mementos, and other heirlooms from our grandfathers home would be an enormous undertaking, but he felt a duty to preserve the family history contained with the house. My brother Jared and I (though reluctant due to the sheer magnitude of the task) agreed. We'd often, upon visiting my grandfather remarked on both the vast collection of antiques and furniture that he and my grandmother had collected over the years. But were unaware until we stood in the uninhabited home just how many truly beautiful antiques there really were. Upon arrival on our first trip to move some of the antiques, we had our first taste of the work we had before us. We moved a massive antique desk, hand carved in the early nineteen hundreds, and assembled with dovetail joints, followed by a secretary, dated by its original craftsman to eighteen seventy three. Along with these we found paintings, books, and figurines all dating back a hundred years or more. And all that was simply what we had to move to get to the rest.

We encountered furniture that had not modern counterpart, which all required explanation and investigation for me. Such as a set of courting chairs, dating back to the late eighteen hundreds. A set of three chairs, one ornate and open, the other a tight sitting chair, and the final a plain wooden chair. My father described them to me as the seat for the young man doing the courting (the sitting chair), a seat for the young lady (the wide sitting chair, which allowed her to cross her legs) and a plain chair for the chaperone to sit in while observing. The difference between the society and culture this furniture was intended for, and the one I'd grown up in staggered me. To think that I was within living memory for some in my family simply added to the wonder. I also found most chairs were almost 6 inches lower to the ground because of the height difference in our generations.

The one piece I remember the most though, was the mahogany side board. Over 100 years old, almost ten feet long, and five feet tall. It undoubtedly weighed more than four hundred pounds without the three sets of antique china that we found within it. But its most memorable quality was that it was more beautiful than anything I have ever seen in a furniture showroom. It was truly unique, even in a house of unique items. Its finish was perfect, and most of its veneer was still intact. Its drawers and cabinets still had original knobs, and none of it had been resurfaced. As far as we could tell, it was all original. To have a piece that old, be that untouched by time, simply blew my mind.

Moving from basement, to ground floor, up to the second floor, and finally the attic. No matter where we went, we found antiques and treasures, and transported them to a safe new home at my

parents' house. I'd like to claim it was some grand crusade of preservation, but most of the time, it was simply hot dusty work; carrying furniture made of solid hardwood down the narrow staircases of a house built before the first world war. But the things we found made it all worthwhile. Not just furniture, but art, jewelry, tapestries, and items I don't even know how to classify. My mother's favorite by far were the porcelain dolls, some over one hundred years old and made with real human hair. My father loved discovering some of the artifacts of his childhood, and of the childhood of his own fathers as well. And my brother, who was moving into a new apartment, simply loved the beautifully crafted furniture. While in the basement I found a teak box containing some things belonging to my great grandfather. Two Mason's rings, Masonic cufflinks, tie clips and his Boy Scout compass, still pointing north. Having never met my great grandfather, it was a real lesson in his history to find all that, and a great connection to him, having been a boy scout myself.

Through the many days spent traveling up and down stairs, through the narrow halls and around that old house; it begun to become just a shuffling task. The beautiful hand carved veneers, and dusty documents detailing my family's every movement and achievement, all began to become 'stuff'. Stuff to be boxed, placed in a truck, and taken to the house or storage. Though now that it's completed, months after the fact, as the great room at my house stands full of beautiful museum qualify pieces, I realize and regret that thinking. Some of the pieces we moved last, like the pharmacists jars that used to decorate my great-great-grandfather's general store, and the warped wooden cabinet that still has mud in the joints from the nineteen thirty seven flood, were truly some of the most astonishing items we recovered.

When I walk through my house with a guest now, it's not so much a tour of my home, as it is a tour of my family history. "What's that?" someone will ask, as we pass through the living room, or great room. And I will launch into a story of my great grandmother buying an ornate mirror from a souvenir shop outside the Whitehouse, over seventy five years ago. Or describe the necessity of a sideboard in a home in the eighteen hundreds. I often feel like somewhat of a museum curator, dusting pieces, helping to hang paintings, or putting my skills as a woodworker and artist to the test, doing repairs to some of the more damaged pieces. The latter providing me with perhaps the most humbling portion of this experience. Given that I considered myself quite skilled, until, with all my specialty tools and books, I barely manage to recreate work done by men with hand tools in unlit shops, hundreds of years ago. It instilled a great respect for the craftsman, and a greater reverence for even the simplest woodworking on a piece.

My father mentioned, when all this began; that he, his father and brother had a similar undertaking once upon a time. When my great grandfather had died, and his house at Indian Lake in Hawesville stood empty. He talked about moving all the antique tables, and chairs, and cabinets. The family heirlooms he saved from there, only to lose when the barn they stored many of them in burned. And he spoke of how, before those trips to the small house on Indian Lake, and back home again, he never really had a reverence for our family's past. It just was, and was no interest to him. So I suppose that this ritual of moving these hundreds of items, from one house to another, is a bit of a family tradition. And perhaps, this pilgrimage of antiques, is what keeps the family history alive. And teaches the newest generation of our line that those tables and dressers are not simply wood, but rather roots. My roots.

United Way investing over a million dollars in the region

United Way volunteers across the region are in the process of investing over a million dollars in programs that will help people in three major areas: Education, Income and Health. Volunteers review more than 70 agencies or programs that help thousands of individuals across the region. United Way's support ensures programs help children and youth achieve their potential, promote financial stability and independence, improve people's health, and help people in times of crisis. The funding process in Hancock, McLean, Ohio, Union and Webster Counties has completed and agencies are being notified of their funding levels for 2015.

Hancock volunteers invest \$66,500

"With the recent plant closings and the overall economic climate, gifts to the United Way in Hancock County were reduced by over 16%" according to Scott LaMar, local United Way Community Investment Chairperson. "This was the most challenging year we have had in the community investment process" LaMar added. The United Way work is further complicated because so many people who work in Hancock County live elsewhere and send their gifts to their home counties, which directly impacts how much is available. While local Chair LaMar was pleased United Way was able to fund a total of 25 local programs, he and other panel members expressed their desire to fund several agencies more fully.

Panel member Renae Pierrard, agreed that many of the employees at Domtar and USW Local 1261 come from several surrounding counties and many are engaged with local agencies in their communities and added it is logical they would choose to support those. "United Way allows our employees to contribute to their home-counties and programs, but it makes it tougher on us in Hancock County" she said.

Stephanie LaMar, long-time United Way supporter and volunteer said "This year, once we funded the donor designations and the minimum of \$500 per agency, we had only \$28,000 to fund our largest agencies which requested a total of \$66,000". Furthermore she added "United Way is very good about giving us information regarding our collection rate, and

other information that affects our decisions." The panel reviewed the applications and noted that in some areas United Way was as much as 77% of local agencies' budgets.

With so many requests the panel had to make difficult decisions, but the panel agreed if an agency is going to ask the United Way to fund a major part of an agency's budget, that agency's employees and boards should support the United Way. If not, the panel believes those agencies should possibly look elsewhere for future funding. Agencies that did not complete their applications or include all the documents requested will be asked to do so immediately. Also the panel was concerned about ensuring direct assistance to individuals and in one instance directed the majority of dol-

lars to one agency be applied to direct services only.

"All in all we did the best we could with what we had, but we believe agencies that benefit from United Way donations need to either help us raise more or raise more on their own and ask for less from United Way" stated LaMar. The panel is thankful so many of the agencies in Hancock County help United Way so much, but all agencies need all to be on board and speak with one voice for the benefit of those in the County. "We take our jobs seriously and consider each agency, what they do, who they serve and the people that need those services," according to Scott LaMar. The local Hancock County Community Investment committee selected the following programs and agencies to receive local investments:

AGENCY	INVESTMENT
American Red Cross, Big Rivers Chapter	583
Boulevard Mission	500
Boy Scouts, Lincoln Heritage Council	500
Building Stronger Families	500
Food Pantry	6,500
Foster Grandparent Program	500
Hancock County 4-H	2,481
Hancock County Adult Ed & Literacy Council	6,000
Hancock County Family Resource Youth Center	8,000
Hancock Co. Health Coalition	879
Help Office of Hancock County	9,408
Hospice of Western KY	6,879
New Beginnings Sexual Assault Services, Inc.	500
OASIS - Spouse Abuse Shelter	1,000
Ohio County Equestrian Inc.	656
Project Graduation	1,425
Repair Affair	3,067
RSVP	500
Salvation Army	950
Hancock County SENIOR CENTERS	
Dukes Senior Citizens	577
Hancock County Senior Citizens	864
Lewisport Senior Citizens	2,316
South Hancock Senior Citizens	1,415
Hancock County Senior Services - Meals	10,000
Senior Companion Program	500
TOTAL	66,500

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