

Summary of the April 8, 2013 Meeting

On the evening of Monday, April 8 the first meeting was held to discuss the proposal for a way to honor the people whose land was taken to create Shenandoah National Park. Twenty-three people from four different counties attended. Owners of local businesses, members of the Greene County Tourism Advisory Council and the Economic Development Authority board, authors of books on local history, government leaders from other counties, and members of the community came to offer support. Also in attendance were direct descendants of evicted families, including one person who was five years old at the time his family moved from their home.

Tony Williams, Director of Greene County Economic Development, opened the meeting and welcomed the group. There was some discussion on where the project could be located and the form it might take. Greene County proposed a general location along Rt. 33 on the approach to the park, though no specific parcel has been identified at this time.

The original idea for the project was that one location would represent the displaced people from the eight counties where land was acquired for the creation of the park. Each county would have a separate monument at this site. During the meeting a suggestion was made that the eight counties cooperate to create a common theme for the project. Each county would then develop its own site for its memorial that could include specific aspects of the county's history relating to Shenandoah National Park or to other relevant themes, allowing the counties to include their own local flavor and personality. These eight sites would be tied together with a "trail" or driving tour, similar to the Civil War trails, the Crooked Road music trail in Southwest Virginia, the wine trails, and the artisan trails that have become popular in recent years.

It was also suggested that the project's sites could become places where descendants share their stories and remembrances. Perhaps in cooperation with local historical societies these stories can be collected and saved for the future. The sites could help preserve the culture of the park families by providing demonstrations of or classes in crafts and traditions that are rapidly slipping away and may soon be lost.

Whatever form the project takes it will need to not only honor the sacrifices of the people whose land was taken for the park, but it should also be able to help present day and future visitors develop a deeper appreciation for the park that is available for us because of what the families lost. It will be important to design the project with appropriate uses of technology so that it will have appeal for the younger generations.

The energy and passion shared at the meeting on Monday evening indicate that we have enough interest and support to move forward with this project. Now that the general idea has been accepted the work begins. A wide range of talents and skills are needed to carry out this work.

Where do we go from here and what needs to be done?

- The second meeting will be held in June on a date to be announced soon. Anticipating a greater turnout, this meeting will be held in a larger space to

accommodate more supporters. People are needed to plan this meeting and to get the word out.

- To guide the project a steering committee will be formed. The steering committee will help plan future meetings and will establish other committees, such as fund raising, publicity and design that are necessary to get the project off the ground. Contact me if you would like to be a part of the steering committee.
- Word needs to be spread within the local community and to the other counties around the park to familiarize more people with the proposal. Please talk up the idea. Tell all your friends and family members. If you belong to a church, service, civic, or other community organization, suggest that your group become involved in supporting and promoting the park families project. Arrange for a speaker to come to your meeting to talk about the project.
- The proposal will be presented to civic and service clubs in communities all around the park. Speakers are needed to give brief presentations at meetings in Greene County and beyond to spread the word about the project. Would you like to be a presenter?
- We need a name! For lack of a better name I have been referring to this project as the Park Family Memorial Project. Several people have commented that the word, “memorial”, sounds like something or someone has died. This project honors the past but it also is about looking to the future. We need a name that captures the essence of its purposes, one that will be readily identifiable to local residents and tourists alike and will make people want to come see what we have created. Please send suggestions for names!

On April 16 I gave a brief interview on the project proposal to NBC29, the Charlottesville NBC affiliate. You can check out the piece at:
<http://www.nbc29.com/story/21994174/greene-plans-to-honor-families-displaced-by-shenandoah-national-park>

Follow the progress of our project on Greene County Tourism’s Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Greene-County-Economic-Development-and-Tourism/363587643710037>

and on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ComeToGreene>

Best wishes,

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(No matter how much money we need to fund this project the contact list will never be sold. If you do not want to receive emails concerning this project please contact me.)