

Abstract:

Local festival, Harvest of History, shows how festivals have had to modernize for society to attract patrons both locally and nationally. Through rescheduling yearly of the festival dates, incorporating minorities featured, and expanding people that are showcased to include surrounding counties, Harvest of History has been able to survive in the small town of Glasgow, Kentucky. Interview with Sherry Wesley, newspaper articles, audio and video help expand and defend this thesis.

## History Through Walking Tours: A Look at Harvest of History

By Kevin R. Brown

In this paper, I will explain what the Harvest of History is, how it came about in the community of Glasgow, Kentucky, and how I became aware of this event. I will be looking at how the History of Harvest festival has had to modernize to local patrons and tourists. Also, how History of Harvest has modernized by rescheduling the event to accommodate other local events, the incorporating of minorities in the performers displayed, audience demographic, and the expanding of featured people beyond Glasgow to determine the impacts of festival change on the Glasgow community. Pictures, video, newspaper articles both locally and internationally are part of my methodology, along with audio interview with one of the creators of Harvest of History, Sherry Wesley, and research from Ebscohost, also implemented into the paper.

A cool autumn evening finds my wife, son and I heading to the Glasgow Municipal Cemetery on a September evening, last year, to pay our respects to my late father. We were met at the entrance by an older white male with salt and pepper short hair, clothed in khaki dress pants, dress shoes, and a casual dress shirt. We were told that the cemetery was closed due to a festival that was happening at the location. Through explaining my reason for being there, he allowed me to proceed. We thanked the man and proceeded to my father's gravestone. The scene that awaited us coming into the cemetery was something that I will never forget. The second curve, where the road splits into various directions is where we caught our first glance. On the right side of the road, leading into what is known locally as the older section of the cemetery,

white bags with small candles lit, was placed to guide the festival members. The sun was slowly fading with a rose-colored sunset showing behind Fort Williams. Luminaries light the path to two tike touches placed around one gravestone with a middle-aged female dressed all in white. The actor was dressed in all white, including a white hat, resembling a nurse's outfit from the early 1900. We stopped to admire for a few seconds then proceeded to my father's gravesite. Upon leaving the cemetery, I inquired about the festival and that is how my family was introduced to the event, Harvest of History.



According to Sherry Wesley, director of the cultural center and my informant, the concept of the event began in 2009 when Sherry Wesley and former director, Gail Berry attended

a Museum training seminar at Owensboro, Kentucky. The seminar brought in actors from “The Voices of Elmwood”, another cemetery festival re-enactment performed in Owensboro. With the help of volunteers within the community, Sam Terry of The Progress, and both Gail Berry and Sherry Wesley, the Harvest of History came about. When I inquired about how the cultural center started the event Harvest of History, Wesley explained, “We were both really interested and thought that was a fascinating way to share local history and to share the uniqueness of our local history as well, and to emphasize that every person has a story to tell {Kinslow 2010}.”

The event has been going on for 5 years. The Harvest of History starts at the Barren County Cultural Center, where patrons are able to see artifacts and hear history of “The Barrens”. After paying a fee of \$12 each, the group is shuttled to Glasgow Municipal Cemetery using local buses donated by various sources including local churches and the Glasgow recreational department. The group is dropped at the pillars near the front entrance of the cemetery, where volunteers are waiting to usher the group to each of the locations in the cemetery. Golf carts, also donated, are used in extreme cases for the elderly, while the tour is walking from certain tombstones that are set up for the event. To help guide the group, white paper bags with a candle inside are lit displaying the path through the cemetery, while a tour guide is placed in front of the group and one behind. Locations vary where actors are placed each year but tourists walk up to the tombstones to experience a life of someone that is from the past. Using accurate artifacts and period clothes, volunteer actors orally and through gestures, explain the life they are portraying.

Most all artifacts, clothing, actors, guides and transportations, are all volunteers. Harvest of History is a fundraiser for the museum and all monetary value from the tour goes to supporting the museum and its programs. The actors and volunteers come from surrounding

counties to participate in the yearly event. Local community ties help Wesley find people to portray the characters and sources of information to use for the event. Sources cited by Wesley included her church and other local churches/organizations, Barren County High School, the Far Off Broadway players located in Glasgow, and the Barn Lot theater production company in Metcalfe County {Wesley 2014}. Costumes are borrowed from the Kentucky Repertory Theatre in Horse Cave, the Far Off Broadway Players in Glasgow and the First United Methodist Church in Glasgow (Kinslow 2014). Another main volunteer for the event according to Wesley is Red Carter. Red Carter is the designer of not only the clothes but of the artifacts used in the production of the events.



Ulysses Grant McFarland portrayed by Jim Nelson  
Photographed by: Melinda J. Overstreet



Local community media also plays a part in Harvest of History in many ways. The Glasgow Daily Times releases articles pertaining to the event, which is featured each year, a little bit about the person featured, the person who is portraying the character, location, time and photographs of the event. Jobe publishing of Glasgow, Kentucky does the same as Glasgow Daily Times but since the company has more publications than the Daily Times, the event is featured in the Metcalfe/Edmonton paper that the company also prints. Local radio station WCLU, came up with a clever way to feature the event by having the actors call into the station portraying the characters they represent. From there, the host does an actual interview of the character on live broadcast for audiences to enjoy.

Rescheduling the event date each year has been one key for Wesley to help keep the event popular and local patrons coming. At the beginning of my interview I explained how the year before, I have had the chance to stumble upon the event. I placed the time around October and Wesley explained that it was September. I asked why the event was not done in October where the event would have more of a fall feel; Wesley explained that if the events were done during October, most people would believe that it pertained to Halloween. In an interview with Glasgow Daily Times, Wesley commented, “We want to portray this as something to honor those people. It’s not a ghostly kind of thing. It’s not a Halloween prank. If you think about it, there’s a whole lot of history in any cemetery. I think that’s the emphasis we wanted to take[,] {f}or people to take it seriously and for it to be a historical type of event {Kinslow 2010}.”

Society would focus more on the aspect that the event is placed in October, the month of Halloween that the event would lose all significance. Wesley goes further to explain that the event, at the beginning, was around the last weekends of September, but “we were running into issues with Fall Break and people leaving for Fall Break. Another thing I run into if there is a

Western or UK game; it is harder to get actors and people to come {Wesley 2014}.” Because of other events going on within the community, the festival would suffer both in attendance and in volunteers.

Thornhill’s heritage festival in Thornhill, Ontario, is proof of Wesley’s assumptions and what happens if the days are not planned correctly each year. In 2010, Thornhill’s heritage festival was canceled because the date was the same as the Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur {Joseph 2).

Another example, the Holi festival, has changed how many days the festival is. This Hindu festival in India is a traditional spring festival. Like other festivals around the spring, Holi is a celebration of surviving of fall and winter times and the triumph of good over evil. This festival first started out as a 16-day event but over the years, has had to condense down to 2 days because of modernization {Awesomeji 2014). All three examples show problems or issues faced pertaining to scheduling, not just the Harvest of History, but also all festivals in modern society.

Modernization has brought about a great change for society. Originally, festivals and events were predominately male, European descent focused but with the growing times, this aspect has become less and less. Harvest of History has not only helped with this but by drawing all lifestyles to this event has kept up with modern times. In 2010, fictional character Aunt Hattie, a female slave, was portrayed, along with Annie Gordin, first white born in Barren County and one-time owner of Mammoth Cave. In 2011, four female characters were featured with the prominent feature being Ella Carden. This female character is the same women found on top of the tombstone in Glasgow Municipal Cemetery. One local urban legend is that if a person climbs up on the tombstone and sits on her lap, the statue will push you off. In 2012, three female characters and one African American male were featured while 2013 featured four female

characters and one African American. The 2014 event had three female characters and an African American male. Looking into the data from the characters portrayed, I was able to see 50% of the characters portrayed are minorities. When I asked Wesley how the community receives these variations, the reply was, “as far as I know, as far as anything has been said to me or observed, it has been positive {Wesley 2014}.” Local communities have moved from the traditional aspects of previous cultural thoughts/opinion and evolved to incorporate minorities in society.



Aunt Hattie, female slave, portrayed at the 2010 Harvest of History  
Photographed by: Unknown

Christopher S. Thompson can find further proof of this issue in “The Ochiai Deer Dance: A Traditional Dance in a Modern World”. The Ochiai Deer Dance is a traditional festival in Japan comprised of six to twelve actors dress up as mushishi deer. Led by a Shinto priest, the troupe goes around communities and shrines performing. The festival is considered to bring luck and was used for weddings, births, funerals, exorcisms and the troupe even made house calls. Throughout the years, this traditional festival was in decline until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when certain traditions were abolished. Thompson states, “Anyone interested in performing or working behind the scenes for the cause of preserving shishi odori, regardless of their place of birth or location of residence,” (Thompson 135) was allowed and “women were accepted as performers for the first time” (Thompson 135). It took this traditional festival to become close to extinction to modernize while the Harvest of History realized from the beginning and was able to attract more local people.

During the first two years of the event, the festival only focused on the people buried in the Glasgow Municipal Cemetery. However, during the naming of the festival, the informant and Gail Berry, expanded to encompass the surrounding counties or what is known as “The Barrens”. According to Wesley, the name “The Barrens” came about through settlers’ reaction to this location. Wesley explains,

“The Barrens were, this area was used as a hunting ground many, many years ago for Native Americans and what they would do is hunt, they would come here to hunt and then would go back North to live. When they left, they would burn everything off and then they would have all these new shoots and when they came back to hunt, that would attract the deer, the elk, and the buffalo through it. Maintain that hunting habitat. So, when settlers came to this general area, they

said this is just barren land nothing grows here and it was not just Barren County but the surrounding area.” (Wesley 2014)

Not only people from Barren County are considered “Barrens” but surrounding counties are also incorporated into the term.

The first time I was able to see the festival, however brief, I did notice one important detail. The audience was predominantly older, white, male, and middle-class to elite-class with only a few older white females. Because of this thought, I asked Sherry Wesley about the demographic of patrons to verify my original thesis on the matter. Wesley replied, “There is a balance between male and female but as far as ethnic, the main people that come here to the museum is white and the people that come to most any of our activities here are white. There is a small percentage of African American that comes {Wesley 2014}.” This got my thinking of many questions. In today’s society, why are minorities not as active in not just events and festivals but community projects? Why also is poverty class missing from the event? The cultural center is free for everybody but why have I never been? I place blame with myself. As I grew up, my parents were not active in anything pertaining to the community and from my raising, I became the same way. I have had to modify my upbringing since having my son, but I still tend not to get involved with the community. To think about that statement, I have to say not just the community but society. I believe my own feelings of shortcomings have made me withdraw from society. If it was not for Liam, I believe this would be more pronounced but since his birth, I have become more active in community events that pertain to him. The event itself is a wonderful idea but during the interview I was a little disappointed about the funds not being used for the community and instead just the center. I do see why this happens though. Lack of grants to collect our history is one major reason. As Wesley and I both agreed during my interview,

society has a need more than wants mentality. Example would be to add “funding to the cultural center or fix the road that is in need of repair” {Wesley 2014}, same example by Wesley during our talk. I have to agree with her thoughts on the subject but it does not make my thoughts or feelings any less. Society is so caught up in the everyday that places or history and culture are slipping by or not getting the credit it deserves from mainstream culture. How better to not make mistakes then to look at our past and learn. As you can see from the paper, you can see I added information about where the name “Barrens” came from. I have lived in Glasgow, Kentucky all my life and I never knew the story. I found this piece of history partially interesting so I added it to my paper because in my arrogance, since I was unaware of how the name came about, that there will be others in the community that will also not know.

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