

**The Highland County Historical Society**  
**“The Hillsboro Project”**  
**Monthly Grant Application Narrative**

**1. What do you plan to do?**

The purpose of this planning grant would be for the planning of an exhibit featuring the story of the 1954-1956 fight for school integration in Hillsboro, Ohio. Tentatively entitled "The Hillsboro Project," this story would form the basis of an exhibit in the Highland House Museum owned by the Highland County Historical Society.

The small town of Hillsboro, Ohio (population 5,400 in 1960) was the site of the first northern lawsuit after the Brown vs. the Board of Education, the Supreme Court decision declaring segregation illegal, making Hillsboro an important part of history. Black children in Hillsboro were forced to attend a segregated schoolhouse. The county engineer, a white man, set fire to the school to try to force desegregation, but still the local school board refused. A group of "Marching Mothers," began a two-year protest. Every day they took their children by the hand and walked them to the Hillsboro Elementary School only to be refused entrance. This protest caught the attention of Thurgood Marshall, fresh from the Brown vs. Board of Education victory, who sent one of his chief strategists, Constance Baker Motley, along with the NAACP, to Hillsboro to represent the mothers in the first test case in the North. Eventually the Marching Mothers won their fight and Hillsboro Elementary School became integrated.

Recently five women, who were the children in this story, met with members of the Historical Society museum. They were concerned that this story would disappear after their death. They wanted this story told and preserved in our museum for future generations. This story has been extensively researched over twelve years by Susan Banyas, a Hillsboro resident who was a witness to the story. She has done extensive interviews with most of the people involved in this story. One mother is still living (100 years old June 2016), as are all the children. Susan Banyas has worked with them and has written a play that has been performed in many places throughout the United States, including The National Underground Railroad Museum, and in Hillsboro itself. Ms. Banyas has an extensive amount of research materials, including interviews, photographs, and documents. She is an expert on this subject. Susan has agreed to work as a consultant on this project. As Chairman of the Historical Education Committee and Vice Chairman of the Board, I would be the Project Director. A small committee of Historical Society volunteers will also work on this project. Dr. Howard Sacks, a distinguished scholar from Kenyon College, will consult and contribute his expertise on the Humanities and African American life. Together we will plan this exhibit. He has experience in collecting oral history interviews, vital to this project.

This grant would be used to hold a planning session at the Highland House Museum in Hillsboro in March 2016 for the purpose of planning this exhibit. How can we best tell the story? How is this applicable today and what have we learned? What would this exhibit look like? Dr. Sacks has agreed to come to Hillsboro as has Susan Banyas, now a resident of Portland, Oregon. Perhaps some of the persons involved in the story would join us as well for part of the planning meeting. By the end of this meeting we will have a plan for the exhibit and a timeline. It is difficult to say when this project will end

when we haven't even planned it yet. We will know what we want the exhibit to look like and the story we want it to tell. We will also have a plan for a future grant to get us there.

We are asking Ohio Humanities to help underwrite the honoraria and expenses of the two consultants on this project—Susan Banyas and Dr. Howard Sacks—as well as the cost of a meal and Dr. Sacks' mileage.

## **2. How do the humanities inform this project?**

This project will make use of historical perspectives with an emphasis on the history of integration, particularly the experience in Highland County, by both the white and black Hillsboro communities. The project may also look at an ethics perspective.

It is important to look at the history of integration in the city of Hillsboro and what story it tells. The historical research and oral history interviews will tell the story in the exhibit. The use of film, pictures, newspaper articles, and the actual faces and voices of the people involved will be powerful. History tells us the story but the exhibit needs to bring the visitor to where we are now. What have we learned? Are things different? This topic is as timely today as it was back in 1954. The Historical Museum will embrace the story as part of the town narrative. The "school fight", will be celebrated as a story of direct-action protest staged by five African American mothers, represented in the courts by the most prominent African American female civil rights lawyer at the time, and how the combined efforts of a network of black and white allies created a victory in the courts. The backstory to this victory is also explored in the exhibit - the stories of the mothers, the children, the key players to reveal the complexity and powerful testimony of people who lived through the early struggles and also make note of the situation today. Hillsboro has a history of peaceful civil disobedience to change history. Prohibition had a start here. Mother Thompson and a group of Hillsboro women began going to the bars and asking them to stop serving alcohol. Ken Burns featured Hillsboro in his documentary, Prohibition. The Underground Railroad came through Hillsboro. This exhibit could eventually be a Humanities Room to feature all of these historical events. There are numerous possibilities.

This exhibition and accompanying educational components tell the story of how this played out in one community, and why this drama was key to the unfolding national Civil Rights Movement and its profound effect on the American soul. The story is timely because the drama is reaching a climax. The killing and hate are escalating. We want to honor the warriors for peace and integrate our histories and expand our points of view as a counterforce to fear. We want to energize the community through history!

A look at the ethics of refusing to allow black children to attend the common school, citing lack of space. The ethics of drawing a new school district map, keeping black homes in their own district, even circling particular houses. The ethics of the test made up by the school and given to the black children which placed them all 2 years behind their current grade. The ethics of the Quaker women from Wilmington College who came to Hillsboro to help teach the black children. This exhibit will not blame anyone but help the visitor see how a small group of people overcame what must have seemed like impossible odds in a peaceful way and achieved their goal.

## **3. Who are the humanities professionals and what are their roles on the project.**

The Humanities professionals would be Susan Banyas and Dr. Howard Sacks. Susan Banyas has her MA in multi-media documentary performance art from San Francisco State University. She wrote and directed *The Hillsboro Story* which has toured nationally, spawned school curriculum and has a book in progress. She has been a conference presenter at Columbia University on Oral History and Performance. Susan is not only a witness to the events of 1954, but she has 12 years of extensive research and interviews with all parties involved. Susan is an "expert" on this subject and has all the research. Ms. Banyas has graciously offered to share all her research, documentation, and photographs with the Historical Society for the exhibit, saving us countless hours of research. She brings her artistic flair and oral history knowledge. She has a trusting relationship with the surviving woman which is very important in this unique situation. These women have reason to not trust just anyone with their story and they trust Susan.

Dr. Howard Sacks has taught at Kenyon College since 1975 and received his Doctor of Philosophy from University of North Carolina. Dr. Sacks was selected as Kenyon's first recipient of the National Endowment for the Humanities Distinguished Teaching Professorship in 1994. He has served on panels of the National Endowment for the Humanities and has received over 30 grants. Dr. Sacks brings his extensive knowledge of the humanities and experience with Ohio Humanities and their grants. He has professional knowledge of oral history and how to use it. He has experience in the planning of exhibits. He will come to our museum, meet with us, and will review our materials and help us plan with a humanities focus.

#### **4. How will you publicize the project?**

Once the exhibit is ready, the Historical Society/Museum will issue a press release to our local newspapers about the exhibit. The local papers are The Highland County Press (once a week free paper) and the Hillsboro Times Gazette (subscription paper 6 days per week). Both papers are also available on Face book, Twitter, and on line. The population of the city of Hillsboro is near 7,000 and the population of Highland county is over 43,000. Our small neighborhood radio station would also be happy to do an interview about the exhibit.

The Historical Society has approximately 400 memberships (single, family, business) and the exhibit will be announced in a newsletter sent to members. The exhibit will be announced on our Facebook site(725 followers), as well as our webpage ([hchistoricalsociety.weebly.com](http://hchistoricalsociety.weebly.com)). It will also be announced on Highland County's Facebook page. As with our other new exhibits, there will be an official opening that will include presentations about the exhibit, how it was put together, and the story behind it. This will be done by me, as Project Director and Chairman of Historic Education. The public will be invited to the opening of the exhibit. Admission to our museum is free of charge. It will be a big deal! Local political figures will be invited, such as the mayor and city officials. School officials would also be included. Most importantly, the women involved in the story, along with their families would be featured guests. This would be a great moment of healing, and acceptance. The event will be historically significant! This exhibit will bring in the African American community that has actually been excluded from our museum as none of their history is told there.

Southern State Community College in Hillsboro would be included so that their history teachers could tell their classes. History teachers at the high school will be notified as well. My husband is very active in Rotary and I will go there and talk about the exhibit. This year I did an exhibit on the History of the Highland County Sheriff's Department and promoted it in this way.

It is important to note that most of the publicizing for this event would come at no charge.

#### **5. Who is the intended audience?**

Our audience is our community. This is their history. For once it will be an exhibit that is inclusive of the black community. Our audience is the youth. They need to know this history because it is relevant today.

This historical exhibit reaches beyond our town. We have already had interest from John Bryant of the Freedom Center. Dr. Sacks and I have spoken about the possibility of this exhibit even travelling. This is something we will discuss when we have our planning meeting. It is quite possible that we would reach out and publicize this in the Cincinnati area and/or Columbus.

#### **6. What are the goals and outcomes of the project and how will it be evaluated?**

The goal of this project is to do justice to this story. It has been a suppressed history of our town and it will be brought out into the light and be told in an honest and fair way. The museum's exhibit will model the spirit of integration, which is a spirit that needs to be constantly nurtured. Through the promotion of the exhibit, the story will be retold in the local papers. The conversation will begin again. People who were too young to know or who moved here after the 1960's will hear the history of this event. People will remember the Civil Rights struggle through identifying with the people in their community. We will know if we are reaching our audience by the attendance at the museum. Visitation figures are kept for both special events and daily visitation. Those figures can be compared to previous visitation figures. Visitors are asked to sign in and we plan to do random questionnaires about the exhibit, asking such questions as, "Were you familiar with this event in Highland County prior to visiting today? Did this exhibit meet or exceed your expectations? Did this exhibit change your view of integration?" This will let us know if our goal is being met.

This exhibit will educate our youth about the history of integration and how it happened in their town. A school curriculum has already been written by Susan Banyas that could be used by the local schools. They will learn how ordinary citizens can stand up for change in a peaceful way. We will invite the schools and know if we are successful if they accept.

#### **7. Who is the sponsoring organization?**

The Highland County Historical Society is a non-profit entity which exists to further historical preservation and education in Highland County, Ohio. The Mission of the Highland County Historical Society is "to encourage community involvement in preservation, education and promotion of Highland County history and genealogy for the benefit of all people for present and future generations."

On May 20, 1965 a group of citizens met with the purpose of forming an historical society. In a resolution adopted on January 26, 1966, they purchased an historical building built of 1842 which serves as the Highland House Museum to this day.

The Highland County Historical Society is funded by memberships, donations, and community fund raising events.