

Underground Railroad Days 2010

Before he died suddenly in the spring of 2010 Bill Ayers, Quaker, avid softball fan, rock and roll fanatic and public works director of the Village of Vandalia, decided that Vandalia needed a party. He drew up a plan on yellow lined paper that called for a classic car show, music, yard sales, craft booths, art vendors and tours of local Underground Railroad sites. He called it "Underground Railroad Days". Bill's plan became a reality last weekend, (July 17 and 18, 2010) and quite a party it was.



Hundreds of people shopped the art, craft and yard sale booths in the grassy area next to the Village Hall. They bought pop and lemonade from local kid's stands, and ate food from local vendors. Beautiful classic cars arrived by the dozens, set off by DJ Dennis Ash's classic rock and roll.

Across the street in Milo Barnes Park, the Underground Railroad Society of Cass County (URSCC) anchored several tents that told the story of the URR in Vandalia and the surrounding area. The Minority Coalition of Cass County provided information on the Sanctuary and Deliverance mural currently being painted in downtown Cassopolis. URSCC guided tours of Underground Railroad sites up and down M60. They were packed with people from all over the state, who were amazed at the stories of Ramptown, the Kentucky Raid, and the courage and compassion of the Quakers and African Americans who participated, and made this area unique.

Dr. Michael Nassanay of WMU lectured on Ramptown. Carol Bainbridge of Ft. St. Joseph Museum in Niles gave a talk about the Underground Railroad in Cass County. And the Minority Coalition sponsored a panel of local residents and scholars who spoke about the Kentucky Raid, the mural, and it's meaning for us today.

And we honored Bill Ayers. In front of his family and many people who knew and loved him, the Village of Vandalia dedicated a stone memorial placed at the head of his beloved softball fields. Vandalia Village President, Beverly Young said "I believe Bill would have been happy with the turn out of this entire event".

It was a grand day, people smiled, and so did Bill. We're sure

