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# HISTORY DAY IN REVIEW

*By David Klaassen*

I first became interested in the History Day contest through my history teacher, Mr. Randy Beutler. I had heard of it before, but I never seriously thought of entering it. Mr. Beutler approached two other students, Ray Harris and Steve Seigler, and me about History Day in late November of 1985. He told us all about the contest and the theme of it, which was, "Conflicts and/or Compromise." It sounded interesting to Ray, Steve, and me, so we decided to enter the contest and try our best at it.

There were several different categories in the contest. They were Historical Paper, Individual Project, Group Project, Individual Performance, Group Performance, and Media Presentation, from which we had to choose one. We decided upon the Media Presentation because we figured that it was one of the harder categories and not very

many people would enter it.

The next step was deciding on a topic for our project. We considered many different subjects before choosing the conflict between Clinton and Arapaho over who should have the county seat of Custer County. We chose this particular topic because it was local and would be easier to research and gather information. We also thought that the judges would appeal more to local history, to which they could relate, rather than national or world history. We decided to make our project a slide projection with the narration on a cassette tape.

We started our research soon after we got back from Christmas Break. The District Contest was to be on March 26, so we didn't have much time.

We obtained most of our information from old newspapers contemporary

with the time of the conflict. We used the microfiche at the Al Harris Library on the campus of Southwestern Oklahoma State University and the Clinton Public Library.

Many long hours were spent after school and into the evenings doing research. Along with the microfiche, we used books, files, and old documents. We took pictures of many of the newspapers to use in our slide presentation. We also used some old pictures of the towns of Clinton and Arapaho during the time of the conflict.

Mr. Beutler knew of two elderly ladies who lived during the time of the conflict. Helen Gossman of Arapaho and Vesta Cassady of Clinton were both involved in the heated disputes over the county seat. We traveled to Arapaho and Clinton to interview these two ladies to get a primary source of information. The women were

History Day Winners: (Left to right) David Klaassen, Cathy Dunn, Jennifer Dew and Tim Kerley.



friendly and eager to recall their stories of the dispute. They gave us good, detailed information.

We even went to the Custer County Courthouse one evening to look at old court records about a case that involved two judges from the respective towns. We also took pictures of the courthouse while we were there to use in our presentation.

We found out some interesting information during all of our research, which helped add some excitement to our work.

After we had gathered all of the information and taken all the pictures we thought we needed, it was time to write the narration for the presentation.

We tried to write it so that it contained all of the needed information and still sounded interesting and not boring and dull. After we completed the script, we chose the slides to use in the program.

For the contest, a short report had to accompany the presentation telling how we obtained our information and how it helped us in putting together our project. We also had to type a full-length bibliography along with our narration. We presented all of this to the judges in the contest. Our bibliography ended up being over two pages long.

After we had the narration typed, we had to figure out some way to clearly record it on a cassette. A conventional tape recorder would not provide a clean enough recording to use in the contest. So we contacted radio station KBXR of Weatherford to see if they would help us make the recording. They readily agreed, so since we had decided to use my voice, Mr. Beutler and I went to the radio station one day during school to make the reproduction. Billy Shell, a disc jockey at the station, helped us make a quality recording.

Now that we finally had everything together, we were ready for the District competition. It was to take place at Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

The day finally arrived, and we were ready and eager to show off the result of all our hard work. Everything ran smoothly, and to our surprise, we walked away with First Place. Both the First and Second Place winners were able to move on to the state competition, so we eagerly awaited the contest which was to be held on May 8.

We made a few improvisations on our project before the state competition to better our chances of winning. We

traveled to the State Capitol Building on May 8 and did our best to place in the contest. The First and Second Place winners here got to move on to the National Competition in Washington, D.C. We could hardly believe it when they called our names and announced us as First Place winners.

So we were off to D.C., something we had only joked about a few months earlier. We didn't change our project any because we really didn't expect to win. After all, there were projects from all over the United States competing with us. We were just going along to have a good time, and a good time was just what we had. It was also an educational experience.

We left on May 15, 1986, for the eight-day trip. We stayed in the dorms on the campus of the University of Maryland, College Park. That is also where the competition was held.

We were able to see all the sights including the White House, the Vietnam Memorial, the Capitol, and the Lincoln Memorial, just to name a few. We also heard Ted Kennedy speak at the Awards Assembly on our last day in Washington, D.C. We didn't place in the competition, but the vacation was a very memorable experience, and all our hard work seemed to pay off.

Well, the 1986-1987 school year started in August, and already Mr. Beutler told his classes that if they didn't do a History Day Project this year, they would have to write a big research paper. I opted to do another project because we had so much fun at Washington, D.C. last year and I wanted to go again.

This time I had to find some new group members because Steve had temporarily moved to Florida, and Ray was taking a different history class. So fellow Juniors Jennifer Dew, Cathie Dunn, Tim Kerley, and I decided to team up and see if we could do better than our group last year.

The theme for 1986-1987 was "Freedom: Rights and Responsibilities." We decided to do our slide presentation over the desegregation of the University of Oklahoma in the 1950's, particularly involving two blacks: Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher and George McLaurin.

We did many hours of extensive research and put much more time and effort into this project than we did the previous year because we were determined to win that trip to Washington, D.C.

Our research was much the same as

the year before; only this year we traveled to Oklahoma City to interview Mrs. Fisher and to Norman to interview George Cross, who was President of OU at the time we were dealing with.

When we had finally completed the project, we felt good about it and were ready to face the competition. At the District Contest on March 25, we placed first somewhat easily. Another group from Weatherford placed second behind us.

We changed our presentation quite a bit for the State Competition because we wanted to go to D.C. really bad. We thought we had a decent chance of winning, but placed second in the contest. Still, second place was good enough for the trip to Washington, D.C., so we were very excited.

The trip this year was just as much fun as the first, except this year the payoff was a little more. We didn't really expect to place at the National Competition this year because the competition at the national level is so stiff.

Everything ran smoothly during our presentation, but we saw some of the other projects and they seemed much better than ours. But to our surprise, our presentation was chosen to be in the eight-group runoff. So we presented our project again to the judges and eagerly awaited to hear the results at the Awards Assembly on the last day.

It finally arrived, and we were quite optimistic about the whole thing. During the assembly we were as nervous as ever. Finally the time came and we heard the speaker announce our names as second place winners. I could not believe what I was hearing, but it was true. We had the second-best project in the whole United States. What a payoff for all the hard work we had done!

We haven't yet decided if we are going to do another project this year, but who knows, we may just end up winning first place this time. ■

*DAVID KLAASSEN is a 1988 graduate of Weatherford High School where he maintained a 4.00 grade average, spoke at Commencement as co-Valedictorian, served as president of the Student Council, and enjoyed playing varsity tennis.*