

Mississippi Municipal Excellence Award Application

Town of Carrollton

Population – Under 10,000

Category - City Spirit

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Carrollton Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival

Description of Project

The Town of Carrollton, the Carrollton Pilgrimage Board and the Carroll Society for the Preservation of Antiquities work together to host the annual Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival [CPPDF] to showcase our historic architecture and talented residents. Visitors come from all over the country to enjoy this 2-day event.

Project Summary

The Carrollton Pilgrimage Board, an arm of the Carroll County Development Association, organizes pilgrimage tours of selected homes and other buildings in Carrollton on the first Friday and Saturday of October.

The Town of Carrollton created a walking tour app that covers 26 of the 65 sites on the National Register of Historic Places based on a lesson plan for middle and high school classes. The app is available as a free download from either The App Store or Google Play and comes with options to read the information on a smart device screen or listen to Mississippi TV personality Walt Grayson talk about the sites. The app has been downloaded many times to smart devices around the country and also from some foreign countries. The Walking Tour of Carrollton app is an option for people who want to ride or walk around town without going into the homes. It can be used anytime, not just during the Pilgrimage and from any location.

On Saturday the Carroll Society for the Preservation of Antiquities hosts the Pioneer Day Festival, a time when local artists showcase their talents and sell their art or local musicians perform on the Courthouse lawn. Last year, a Mississippi Writers Trail Marker honoring Carrollton native Elizabeth Spencer was also erected as part of the festival. The Antiquities Society arranged for a guest performer to go to the schools on Friday and also to present some readings from Miss Spencer's work at the Courthouse on Saturday.

A community development specialist from the MSU Extension Service evaluated the event and reported the overall economic impact of the event was over \$100,000.

Signature of Chief Elected Official



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Why was the Carrollton Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival initiated?

As far back as the 1930s, Carrollton has held home tours to showcase the town's beautiful homes. They were not an annual event, dependent on the willingness and health of homeowners. During 1980s, different organizations held arts and crafts festivals whenever they needed money. Again, nothing was consistent.

In 2008, the County celebrated its 175th anniversary. The Carroll County Development Association and the Antiquities Society joined forces to hold the first annual Carrollton and Pioneer Day Festival to showcase local architecture, history and artists. A couple of years after it started, the Town of Carrollton joined the group, strengthening the alliance so that the event has far exceeded the occasional home tours and festivals.

How the Goals of the Carrollton Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival Were Accomplished

Working together, the three groups have created an event that is so unified that it is hard for visitors to know who is responsible for what. The Pilgrimage Board, the Antiquities Board and a representative from the Town Board meet at the Town Hall monthly from February to October to plan and evaluate the event.

The **Pilgrimage Board** finds homeowners who are willing to open their homes to visitors for 2 days. They also make arrangements with the four churches, the Merrill Museum, People's Bank, Gee's Store and the Masonic Lodge to be open as well. A representative from the Board works with the student council volunteers who will serve as docents. The Pilgrimage Board also takes the lead in publicity and grant writing for the event. The first publicity is the Delta Magazine Tourism issue in January with other magazine and newspaper ads following closer to the event. Brochures are printed and mailed to all the Welcome Centers in July. The Pilgrimage Board also maintains the VisitCarrolltonMS.com website.

The **Antiquities Society** has several committees that are responsible for the work it does. The vendor committee begins contacting the previous vendors in early July and posts announcements for vendors on the Carrollton Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival Facebook page. [The website also has a pdf copy of the application that vendors can use.] As applications and fees come in, the Society creates a layout of vendor locations and deposits the fees. Before the Festival, members mark the booth spaces off and number them. On the day of the event, the members assist vendors with unloading and loading as well as transportation to the off site parking reserved for vendors. Members also collect the taxes from vendors, complete the tax report for MDOR and pay the fees. Putting the square and courthouse lawn back in order are the last duties of the Antiquities Society. The pageant committee sponsors the Miss Pioneer Day Festival Pageant the week before the Festival. Registration forms are available on Facebook and the website and are taken to the local schools. Judges, photographer, flowers, sashes and crowns are secured. One of the members serves as the emcee. This committee also arranges for the festival court to be interviewed at the Courthouse when the festival opens. This committee is responsible for publicity about the court. The music committee is responsible for securing an emcee and musicians for the music on Saturday as well as setting the schedule.

The Town of Carrollton also buys ads in various publications. The planning meetings are held at the Town Hall. Docent costumes are stored at the Town Hall and the students will dress and return the costumes there on Saturday evening. Vendor and pageant applications can be dropped off at the Town Hall. The Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival headquarters is located inside the Town Hall. The Town created the Walking Tour app to celebrate the state's bicentennial which supplements the Pilgrimage tours. The educational exhibits which are part of the Festival and the activities that involve the students at school are also the responsibility of the Town.

As a result of these organizations and the many volunteers, attendance ranges between 2,000 and 2,500 [depending on which colleges have home games on Saturday and the weather]. To say they fill the town of less than 200 is an understatement. The Festival started with 20 local vendors in 2008. While most of our festival vendors are still local, there are a growing number who are coming from farther away, some from out of state. Last year, 60 vendors circled the Courthouse, selling their wares. The first weekend in October is becoming "the weekend" to have reunions because so many people are coming home for the event. Last year six classes held reunions and one family enjoyed tours and shopping as part of their family reunion. Free programs are also held for the local schools as part of the event.

Benefits of the Carrollton Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival

It would be easier to say who doesn't benefit from this project. Residents are gaining a new appreciation for their hometown. Vendors reported over \$11,000 in sales with the appropriate taxes coming to the Town. Local musicians are receiving recognition for their talent and bringing enjoyment to the listeners. Student Council members from the local high school are gaining experience working as docents at homes and churches, a very rewarding community service. Other students are also exposed to some aspect of the event through the school programs through class participation. Local businesses do a booming business that weekend. Tours of the Merrill Museum [owned and operated by the Antiquities Society], has resulted in families offering items that expand the depth of the exhibits.

Participation and Partnerships

Volunteers make all of this possible. Without resident participation, the event would not be successful. Homeowners are asked each year to help us evaluate the event from their perspective. This information is combined with evaluation data from the event partners to plan for the next year. Churches open their facilities and parking. The local school opens its gym parking on Saturday for parking. A business provides vehicles for transportation to help people back and forth.

In addition to the three main organizations, members of the following organizations are involved in the program planning, implementation, and evaluation: the Cherokee Rose Garden Club, the Cotesworth Cultural and Heritage Center, the Third Arrow Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Douglas Carroll Junior American Citizen Club Student Council, H. D. Money Chapter, The Conservative newspaper, Masonic Lodge #36, and the Carroll County Sheriff's staff.

Economic & Livability Impact of the Carrollton Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival

The 2018 event was also evaluated by a community development specialist at Mississippi State Extension Service. The overall economic impact of the event to the community was determined to be over \$100,000. Statistics for the 2019 events were very similar to those for 2018.

The Pilgrimage Board uses money it raises with home tours to make improvements in town as the funds grow. The first project was the sign on Highway 82 to let people know where Carrollton is. The next project was to install street signs around the courthouse where many of our activities take place. The Town matched that project by putting signs all over town. The new exhibits to the Merrill Museum continue to draw visitors and more offers for more items.

Future Impact of the Carrollton Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival

The Carrollton Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival will continue to draw people to Carrollton. In February 2020 the Antiquities Society received a request for a vendor application from a new vendor from the Natchez area because at every festival they attended last year they heard about the Carrollton festival and how good it was. 2020 will mark the 10th anniversary of the filming of *The Help*, part of which was filmed at Cotesworth, out from Carrollton. Cotesworth, home of US Senator J. Z. George, will be joining in the planning and implementation of the 2020 Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival, hosting special tours of the house, programs by the movie's food stylist Lee Ann Fleming about the foods used in the movie, and a viewing of the movie.

We are also partnering with the Mississippi John Hurt Blues Festival and the Vaiden Heritage Festival with some publicity as these festivals are happening within a week of our 2020 event. This partnership should benefit all three organizations.

On-line Links for More Information

VisitCarrolltonMs.com

[Carrollton Pilgrimage and Pioneer Day Festival Facebook page](#)

[Walking Tour of Carrollton – The App Store & Google Play](#)