

Memorial needed for Sam J. Ervin Jr.

Readers of this column are assured that it is a free lance production, that it represents the opinion of the writer only; however, it is hoped its readers may find that it embodies a description of one kind of memorial that would be not only an appropriate tribute to Sam J. Ervin, Jr. but a memorial with the primary intent to prolong his influence among us, not to burnish his name.

Such a memorial would have to be an entity in and of itself, whose housing in a structure visible to the eye would shelter an active organization whose existence and functioning would enhance our awareness of our national heritage and increase our vigilance to maintain that heritage by a continuing self-education in the history of our country, thereby enhancing our understanding that the unique structure of our federated republic has enabled fate to smile benevolently upon us as a nation of people.

At present the possibility exists that such a memorial can be achieved if the plan upon which it is based can survive the gauntlet of appraisals whose favorable evaluation is needed.

The general plan calls for the preliminary commitment from the heirs of Sam J. Ervin, Jr. that his home become a part of the public domain for use in housing a library of local history and genealogical records.

It is hoped that his library still in place in the dwelling would be augmented by transferral there of the records now in the North Carolina Room of the library on South King Street, the whole collection to constitute a branch of the Burke County Library System and to be administered as such.

This project poses no threat to public moneys, for in the plainest of words it would lay the foundation of an endeavor that may become a public obligation. Dr. H.G. Jones, prominent historian, on the occasion of a visit to Morganton, commented upon the need for counties of the state to become active in the collection and maintenance of historical records.

He stated that the time is at hand when the central historical collections of the state cannot continue for long being collectors and repositories of county historical materials, that the sheer volume of such records will require that the individual counties assume that responsibility.

This remark clearly indicates that such an institution as here advocated as a memorial to Sam J. Ervin, Jr., is foreseen as a historical necessity in the foreseeable future.

The opinion is here stated that no attempt to establish a perfect library environment should delay the use of the dwelling proposed for the housing of a library of local historical records.

It should be remembered that the



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library on South King Street in Morganton began its existence in a loft in the downtown business district, a small area heated by a stove, with access to it gained by climbing a long flight of stairs.

The historical records now housed in the North Carolina Room in the library on South King Street were assembled in the fall of 1969 with their orderly arrangement requiring many years of labor.

The Burke County Historical Society nurtured this collection through the years of its organization, not only supplying labor through one of its members but money for the purchase of clerical supplies and equipment as well.

Fewer than six county libraries in the state have comparable collections of local historical records. However, its uniqueness as such may perhaps have weakened its claim for space in competition with the more orthodox categories of library assets.

In the small space it occupies, the collection is out at elbow and a minimum of patrons crowd the area.

The realization of such a memorial as here depicted requires the supportive interest of an organization. The most outstanding candidate for this role would be the Burke County Historical Society, a low profile organization that nevertheless has been the most active in the preservation of local historical records but has also, through its sponsorship of two publications made our county one of the best documented in the state.

This society, if approached, might be willing to assume the responsibility for a definite period to be decided by that society of raising funds to establish this memorial.

No mention has been made of the benefits that would accrue to the Burke County Schools from the existence of this memorial, but such benefits could be extensive.

Children who would enter the rededicated home of Sam J. Ervin, Jr. would undoubtedly be stimulated by awareness that a man lived there who was held by the nation to have been a great man.

The memorial described in this writing would undoubtedly have pleased that man, and this writer is of the opinion that he would have liked for his beloved things, his books, to remain where he left them to continue the work he had to abandon.