NML UNVEILS NEW EXHIBIT

NML unfurled its new exhibit in February 2010 with the Grand Opening scheduled for May 2. Called “Emerging American Language in 1812”, it features a linguistic perspective of the events leading up to the War of 1812 (between the United Stated and Great Britain) and the products resulting from its aftermath. The aim of the exhibit in fact is to explore the role of the war in the development of American English. The focus of the exhibit undoubtedly is the “Webster Wall”--a tribute to linguist and renowned lexicographer Noah Webster--found in the activity room. The “Webster Wall” features a large caricature of Webster with a cartoon strip below it. On Webster's right is a listing of words he suggested for change from the original British English spelling highlighting both those accepted (“color” rather than “colour”) as well as those rejected (“tuf” rather than “tough”). On his left is a listing of known dictionary words of the time period. Displayed along the wall is a table which includes copies of dictionaries and primers at the time, e.g., the American Spelling Book (also known as the Blue Back Speller) and the American Dictionary of the English Language, both of which are available for visitors to peruse at their leisure.

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Although Webster is highlighted, he is not the only American recognized. The NML reception room features photos and stories of other prominent Americans at the time who had an impact on English, e.g., Peter Stephen du Ponceau, who did a comprehensive study of Native American languages. Speaking of which, the reception room has a map highlighting the Native American languages which were spoken in the region along with a game for visitors to test their knowledge of Native American words still in use today. The latter, in block card format, has been especially popular because it is more challenging than it seems. This recognition of Native American languages makes the exhibit more complete because of the considerable impact they have had on words or phrases in American English (many U.S. states for example have names which came from the Native Americans). The main highlight of the reception room though is probably the items from the American Commercial and Daily Advertiser and a letter from Dolley Madison displayed on the wall. Nothing shows the language of the time better than its actual use.

This exhibit has as much on-line as it does on the wall. A 3-D timeline, for example, guides visitors through Webster’s historic career. The story of Sequoya, the inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, is found electronically in the reception room. What is best though is that you can actually hear American English spoken in the accent of the time (items from the American Commercial and Daily Advertiser are actually read) as well as hear additional verses of “The Star Spangled Banner” (most people are only familiar with the first one).

The topic was selected with the approaching 200th Anniversary of the War of 1812 in mind, a war in which the Baltimore-Washington area was a major battlefield. In fact, a generous grant from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, made the exhibit possible. Finally, visitors will still be able to see NML’s long-running first exhibit, “Writing Language: Passing It On” in the exhibit room.

--Greg Nedved

Dr. Orin Hargraves speaking at the Grand Opening of Emerging American Language in 1812
Our editor was kind enough to let me off the hook for writing a President’s Column for the previous issue of the Newsletter, but stuck to his guns and is forcing me to put my nose to the grindstone and produce one out of whole cloth for this issue. [I tried to fit five over-used idioms into the previous sentence but only four would fit.]

The Museum is gaining national and international exposure with recent visits by linguist David Crystal and Antoni Mir of Barcelona’s Linguamón. We will soon be featured on Public Radio International’s *The World* in Patrick Cox’s “The World in Words.” We have begun bringing in busloads of school children to experience our new exhibit on the emergence of American English in the early 19th Century and have an exciting annual dinner and silent auction planned for June 27.

I’m only now beginning to get a feel for how much time and effort our President Emerita Amelia Murdoch put in to establishing and maintaining the Museum. I also have a greater appreciation for the tremendous contributions being made by others working as docents, on committees and on the Board of Trustees.

That said, we need to have many more people involved in the operation and promotion of the Museum. We need people who are excited about the idea of a National Museum of Language…people with ideas, energy, time and resources.

I challenge you to renew your commitment to the Museum and to help us extend our reach and encourage others to join us in this endeavor that’s so near and dear to our hearts. [There, that’s the fifth idiom I was looking for in the first paragraph!]

--Gary McCone
(Editor’s Note: As Gary mentions above, Patrick Cox from Public Radio International (PRI) visited on March 24 to view the exhibits and to interview Pat Barr-Harrison and Gary McCone about the history and purposes of the Museum. Patrick hosts a weekly podcast “The World in Words” on language and languages and the interview will appear on an upcoming episode. “The World in Words” is an integral part of PRI’s The World  http://www.theworld.org/.)

--Greg Nedved

INTRODUCING LINDA THOMPSON

(Editor’s Note: Linda Thompson has replaced Silvina Alarcon as the new NML administrative assistant. As you will discover in her brief autobiography below, she has language skills galore.)

Linda Thompson attended New College of the University of South Florida, graduating with a BA in Classics. Her studies included Latin, Greek, Spanish, and Old English (Anglo-Saxon) literature. She then attended the University of Minnesota, where she earned an MA in Classics, continuing her studies in the above-named languages as well as in Middle English literature and, to a lesser extent, French and Italian. Linda acquired office experience by working in two departments at Arnold Print Works (a cloth-printing factory in MA), in the accounting office of the San Francisco State University bookstore, and as a long-term temporary employee in the Customer Relations Dept. of Manufacturers Hanover Trust of California. She and her husband moved to Maryland in 1984. When Linda began working as a substitute teacher in Prince George’s County Public Schools in 1986, it was called to the attention of Dr. Dora Kennedy (then the Supervisor of Foreign Language for P.G.C.P.S.) that Linda had a background in Latin. Dr. Kennedy promptly proceeded to recruit her for P.G.C.P.S. Linda worked as a teacher of Latin and Spanish in Prince George’s County until June 2004, with both Dr. Kennedy and then subsequently Dr. Patricia Barr-Harrison as supervisors. Her primary position during that time was with the county’s Traditional Classical Academy/ Academic Center program (part of the Magnet Schools program), teaching the Introduction to Latin curriculum to TCA/AC students. Restructuring of the Magnet Schools program resulted in the elimination of Linda’s position, so she opted to pursue a PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of Maryland in College Park. She is currently working on writing her dissertation, the working title of which is An Examination of the Rhetorical Concept of Kairos in the Homeric Epics. Linda is also a study group leader for the Latin Scholars group at the University of Maryland’s Osher Lifelong Learning Center (a position formerly held by Dr. Kennedy, from whom Linda took over after Dr. Kennedy’s death), and a display of her artwork is currently on view at the Osher Center. Linda is also a civilian member of the Twentieth Legion, a first-century Roman era historical re-enactment group based in Laurel, MD. Even after leaving PGCP.S, Linda maintained her friendship with Dr. Kennedy, who first made her aware of the existence of the National Museum of Language. Because Linda’s academic pursuits have always been language-centered, applying for the position of administrative assistant at NML seemed a logical step to take.

--Linda Thompson

GROUPS VISITING THE MUSEUM

Groups that visit the Museum come in all sizes and from many domains. These groups represent: family groups (seven members of a family once), university classes, elementary, middle and high school students (public/private/parochial), home-schooled classes, government groups, book clubs, senior citizens, adults with friends, “English as a Second Language” groups, and teacher groups.

When groups come into the Museum, docents customize the tours based on the background or desire of the visitors. A few months ago, a group of boys from a private boy’s school visited. These students were studying Spanish and German and, in addition to the exhibits, we added German and Spanish information. We had students sing along with a CD in Spanish about the countries making up Latin America while looking at individual maps of the countries. Currently we have added “Jeopardy-Type Questions” to the DVD that we have of the 1812 War, and a spelling test follow-up to the “Webster Wall.”

--Pat Barr-Harrison
AMELIA MURDOCH SPEAKER SERIES

NML has over the years conducted many speaker programs. In recent years, the speaker programs have essentially turned into a speaker series which are held at the Museum itself (sometimes allowing visitors to see the Museum for the very first time). The speaker series is a case in point. In 2010 the NML decided to name its speaker series after President Emerita Amelia Murdoch, a fitting tribute to the Museum’s long time president. The following are descriptions of two powerhouse presentations, the first two of the Amelia Murdoch Speaker Series:

--Greg Nedved

Antoni Mir

LINGUAMON PRESENTATION

The NML was honored by a visit from Antoni Mir, the director of Linguamón: the House of Languages, in Barcelona, Spain, on Sunday, February 21, 2010. Linguamón: the House of Languages is the Spanish version of NML and is slated to officially open its spaces in 2012 thanks to generous financial backing from the government of Catalonia. Mir began his presentation with a short video of his future museum, providing more details in his prepared text which followed. He stated, for example, that Linguamón was devoted to promoting linguistic diversity and would have three themes—culture, technology, and business. Specific sections would be entitled “Language Makes Us Human,” “Language for Life,” “Language Diversity,” and “Languages Need Speakers and Speakers Need Language.”

Mir did not restrict his comments to Linguamón though. He also spoke about Catalan, his native tongue, and an endangered language in Spain (although he did say that it was a popular blog language!). In his slide presentation, he showed an endangered frog on the island of Majorca (his
home) and observed that people there were more worried about the frog becoming extinct than Catalan. He also stressed language diversity, noting that “the days of relying upon English were over.” Blogging, for example, is no longer an English language monopoly. In this regard, he opined that the Internet was great for spreading culture.

Mir’s presentation, although on short notice, was nonetheless well-attended. Prior to his speech, Dr. Amelia C. Murdoch, the Museum’s founder and president emerita, spoke about the history of NML, highlighting key events and players along the way. She closed by promoting NML’s new exhibit “Emerging American Language in 1812,” which opens in February.

Mir’s visit was instigated by NML Associate and University of Maryland Professor, Dr. Janet Chernela, who had visited his museum in Barcelona.

--Greg Nedved

“VISUALS” FROM THE VISUAL COMMUNICATION PRESENTATION

The NML was the place to be for a presentation you had to “see to believe” on Sunday, March 21, 2010. Entitled “Beyond Words: The Unlimited Potential of Visual Communication,” this presentation was also noteworthy because it was given by long time Museum patron and staffer Amy Carattini, a current doctoral student at the University of Maryland, along with her former professor, Dr. Gail Thakur, a sociocultural anthropologist currently at American University.

The presenters argued that visuals were a predecessor to language itself because they were basic to human thought. It was fateful that the presentation was given in the Museum’s exhibition because the exhibit on display there, “Writing Language: Passing It On,” essentially categorizes written symbols (or visuals) as representing sounds (alphabetic) or images (logographic). The presentation showed how both essentially made visual communications less powerful by making them more functional.
You could say however that visual communications are making a comeback. In this age of images (still and moving), visual communication has never been more dynamic and relevant, something that will continue because of technology. There is in fact "unlimited potential" since visuals actually complement the written language rather than supplement it, a powerful combination indeed.

As you can imagine, the use of visuals was critical to the presentation’s effectiveness. Attendees saw a wide variety of them, ranging from cuneiform writing to the artwork of Gordon Parks. Visuals were also shown to reflect pervasiveness, identity, multi-dimensionalism, memory, universal connectivity, ideology and aspirations. In one of the liveliest sessions in recent memory, attendees guessed at what the visual actually meant. Often there was no consensus and usually far from it. This is the power of visuals.

--Greg Nedved

NML ANNUAL DINNER

Plans are well underway for the NML annual dinner to be held this year on Sunday June 27, 2010, at the Clarion Inn in College Park. In fact you may well have received your invitation in the mail already! This year’s keynote address is entitled “Publications Censorship during the U.S. Occupation of Japan, 1945-1949" and is presented by Eiko Sakaguchi, Curator, and Amy Wasserstrom, Manager, of the Gordon W. Prange Collection at the University of Maryland. Their presentation will discuss a number of aspects to the censorship of publications in Japan during the U.S. occupation period, including a proposal that Japan convert to an entirely Romanized language.

Although every annual dinner is a little different (part of their charm), you can expect this year’s dinner to include the always popular silent auction, featuring items donated by our generous area merchants and NML officers and friends. You can also expect this year’s event to bring together Museum friends of the past and present, to include many from out of town and state (again, part of their charm). An awards presentation and the door prize drawing will follow the speakers. Tickets sell for $35 for members and $39 for non-members. Please note that $20 of the cost of each member ticket ($24 of each non-member ticket) is tax-deductible.

--Greg Nedved

EDITOR’S UPDATE

( Editor’s Update: Below is a brief summary of the May 2 Grand Opening for the “Emerging American Language in 1812” exhibit (see “NML Unveils New Exhibit” on Page One for more details).

After opening comments by President Gary McCone and Project Coordinator Dr. Pat Barr-Harrison, Orin Hargraves, the official lexicographer for the exhibit, gave a history lesson about the English language of the time period before fielding questions from the audience. Amy Carattini then identified the important American language shapers of the time. Next, Dr. Jill Robbins introduced the “Webster Wall.” Since Dr. Robbins is taking a brief hiatus from the Museum for a job overseas, Dr. Barr-Harrison also brought her a cake—good luck, Jill, and many, many, many, many thanks!).

--Greg Nedved
Main Exhibit -- Writing Language: Passing It On

MOST PHOTOS THIS ISSUE COURTESY OF GARY MCCONE
THANK YOU, GARY!