

Old stories rejuvenate memories

By Tom Batters
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Remember when: Tom Hexamer tells a story as Kelly Imhoff looks on Monday night at the Washington Historical Society monthly meeting.

Lois Sampson held back a laugh as she told her story.

“It was back in the forties, during the Memorial Day Parade,” she said. “My family had guests visiting from New York City, and they were just so intrigued by this small town of Washington.

“Well, one of the guys from New York City was wearing shorts, and *nobody* wore shorts in Washington at that time.

When Fred Switzer (the World War I veteran who led the parade on horseback every year), saw the man in shorts, he fell off his horse,” she said, no longer able to contain her laughter. “He thought the man was wearing underwear!”

The rest of the people in the audience joined Sampson in a roaring laugh that lasted a couple minutes.

Sampson was one of eight speakers who shared their stories at the Washington Historical Society’s monthly meeting Monday night at the Washington Presbyterian Church.

The program, entitled “I’ve Got a Story,” featured young and old Washingtonians who shared some of their favorite memories.

“This is our most popular program every year,” said Stephanie Deiters, who helped coordinate the event for the historical society. “People love to hear old stories.”

Sampson reminisced about the days when the students used to dance all the way from the high school to the square during Homecoming.

She remembered how Mr. Holland used to have a pool table in the back of his barber shop and “no girls were ever allowed back there.”

Tom Hexamer joked about his days working at Marshall’s.

“My job was to put the wieners on a stick,” he said. “I used that on my resume for years, and, boy, that really gets the boss’ attention.”

Other speakers included longtime WCHS basketball coach Dick VanScyoc, fourth generation Washingtonian Kevin Thieme and Tish Waron, who grew up on Avon Circle where all the kids “had the run of the town.”

The audience watched old movies that showed men hurling turkeys from the top of the buildings on the square, as frantic crowds below scampered to get ahold of one.

“They used to do that every Thanksgiving,” Sampson said. “Can you imagine them doing that today?”

The next historical society program is at 7 p.m. Feb. 28 at Washington Presbyterian Church. A Caterpillar historian will be the guest speaker.

To obtain VHS Video Tapes of this, and previous programs, contact The Washington Historical Society at 309-444-4793.