Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art News

May 1, 2010

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May, 2010 (Statesboro, Georgia) - The Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art sadly said goodbye to a dear friend, Smith Callaway Banks, age 73, who passed away in May 2010 after a lengthy illness. An eighth generation native son, he was related to thousands of citizens in Bulloch and surrounding counties. He joined the family dairy business at an early age, dipping ice cream as a young boy and as a young man, delivering milk to local residents. A graduate of Statesboro High, he earned the Bachelor of Arts degree at Emory University, and after post graduate studies at the University of Georgia, he returned home and was married to Willa D. Alexander in 1963. A businessman, he was president of City Dairy, owner of Smith Banks Antiques and a board member of Statesboro CATV, Inc.

Smith Banks invested both his time and resources in projects that benefited citizens. For 18 years, he was a member of the Statesboro Regional Library Board of Directors, serving several years as chairman. He was both a founder and a leader of the Bulloch County Historical Society. His public achievements include the Brannen Genealogy Room in the local library and numerous publications about the history and people of Bulloch County. The Bulloch County Historical Society published his roster of Confederate Soldiers of Bulloch County and a volume of unique historical sketches, "A Bulloch Sampler," as well as articles in a series of publications. He was a member of the planning committee for the bicentennial celebrations of the county in 1996 and of the city in 2003. He was co-author of two pictorial histories about Statesboro and Bulloch County in the popular national series, "Images of America."

He was a curator and board member of the Georgia Southern University Museum, held a membership in the Scottish Heritage Society of Southeast Georgia, the First Families of Georgia, the Mill Creek Chapter of the Sons of American Revolution and an officer and charter member of the Huguenot Society of Georgia. He was also an official historian both of the Bulloch County Historical Society and of the Ogeechee Rifles Camp, Sons of Confederate Veterans and a recipient of the Deen Day Smith Service to Mankind Award as well as the Deen Day Smith Lifetime Achievement Award.
More personally to the Art Department, in 2007 Smith Banks donated a large and unique collection of Southern Folk Art to the Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art where it became the Smith Callaway Banks Southern Folk Art Collection located in the Visual Arts Building. Patricia Carter, Chair of the Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art said, “I’ll miss talking with Smith a great deal... his favorite joke that seemed to wind its way into conversations, intended as a compliment to our friendship... “you’re a yankee, but you’re not a Damn Yankee” -- followed by a succinct recitation of Smith’s family lineage that included cousins, kin of course, hailing from New Jersey, my home state -- typically within five minutes of his delivery of this cornball/bad joke, we’d be in a philosophical conversation about how in reality, we’re all kin. I learned a lot from my conversations with Smith Banks.”

Smith Banks began curating his collection of folk art in the 1980’s when he bought his first face jug. He continued adding to the extensive compilation ever since, and the collection grew in quantity and quality, to well over five hundred pieces of folk art. When Banks’ generously donated his folk art collection to Georgia Southern University, he knew he was guaranteed the opportunity to introduce one of his great passions in life, folk art, to children and adults alike. When the Smith Callaway Banks Southern Folk Art Collection and Research Center debuted on campus in 2007, Banks remarked, “The pleasure I derive from collecting folk art is now matched by my pleasure in sharing it with others...”

What Banks may not have known was the magnitude of influence his collection would have on Georgia Southern students, faculty, and folk artists from the region. For example, a history major that worked side-by-side with Banks while researching the collection discovered her career path as a museum curator. Faculty quickly gravitated to exploring how the vast collection provides a visual documentary of Georgia’s history and culture from the past 200 years, researching how the collection is a rich resource for teaching children. Folk artists quickly became good friends with Banks, as he always demonstrated the utmost respect for their creative work; many of these artists consider their inclusion in Banks’ highly regarded collection as a pinnacle honor.

Banks curated several exhibitions that were displayed in the Smith Callaway Banks Southern Folk Art Collection. “Our students would assist Banks as he would choose pieces for the exhibitions, and as they worked by his side they were provided a rare opportunity to learn from a great historian, as Banks revealed stories rich with history and tell of characters full of life. ‘For the Love of Folk Art’ was the inaugural exhibition to showcase Banks’ favorite pieces in his vast collection. What transpired was probably one of Banks’ greatest challenges in life...editing his choices to a reasonable number that could be properly displayed in one room...he loved each and every piece in the collection, and couldn’t play favorites!” Carter reflects.

The family requests that memorial contributions be made to the First Baptist Church Building Fund, 108 North Main Street, Statesboro, GA 30458; to Statesboro Regional Library, 124 South Main Street, Statesboro, GA 30458; or to the Bulloch County Historical Society, P.O. Box 42, Statesboro, GA 30459.
Smith Callaway Banks Southern Folk Art Collection
224 Pittman Drive
Statesboro, Georgia 30460
[ map ]
912.GSU.ARTS
artdept@georgiasouthern.edu
Hours: Monday - Friday: 9am - 5pm

All events are free and open to the public. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Georgia Southern University will honor requests for reasonable accommodations. For more information contact the Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art at (912) GSU.ARTS or online at http://class.georgiasouthern.edu/art

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