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Tales of the Rough Rider - Great-grandson shares stories about Roosevelt

Pat Whitney - Madison Courier Staff Writer

Tweed Roosevelt, great-grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, helped bring the "Rough Rider" alive at last weekend's Crowe Academy with the late president the topic of this year's discussion.

"The Strenuous Life of Theodore Roosevelt," a two-and-a-half-day event consisting of lectures, video clips and discussion groups, attracted 50 participants from as far away as Florida who were interested in learning more about the energy, vision and leadership of the 26th U.S. president.

Tweed Roosevelt examined his great-grandfather's adventurous life and told tales of an exploration down the River of Doubt in the Amazon Basin that nearly cost him his life.

"Tweed told great stories about Teddy Roosevelt," said John Ahrens, associate director for the Center for Free Inquiry and professor of philosophy at Hanover College. "He told of hardships, even with modern conveniences and described how when Roosevelt got an infection on his leg, a jackknife was the only thing available. They scraped his leg down to the bone, then wrapped it up. It was either survive or die on the journey."



ROOSEVELT KIN: Tweed Roosevelt, great-grandson of Theodore Roosevelt, spoke at Hanover College's Crowe Academy. The topic of this year's annual historical seminar was "The Strenuous Life of Theodore Roosevelt." The Crowe Academy, held annually at the college since 1999, consists of lectures, seminars and participatory experiences. (Photo courtesy of Patrick Pfister)

Tweed Roosevelt, who serves on the executive committee of the Theodore Roosevelt Association and on the board of trustees, then told tales of his own expedition down the River of Doubt with a group of professional explorers in the 1990s, experiences recorder and later made into a television documentary, Ahrens said. His participation in Crowe Academy was made possible by the Rivers Institute at Hanover College.

Participants were encouraged to read "T.R.: The Last Romantic" before attending the academy.

"The book was 700 pages long and was an in-depth discovery of the man known as Rough Rider, Teddy Bear and for setting aside a lot of land for a parks system, mostly out West," said Barbara Kiffmeyer of Hanover, who has attended Crowe Academy several times.

"We learned more about his political life, his thoughts on Woodrow Wilson and other information in detail," said Kiffmeyer, a 1960 graduate of Hanover College who regularly attends the annual academies with her college roommate and other fellow alumni.

"Tweed Roosevelt came to one of our small discussion groups for about 20 to 25 minutes and gave us enlightening examples on Teddy Roosevelt," she said. "He was quite inspirational."

Indianapolis resident Fritz Gordner, who is considered to have one of the foremost collections of Theodore Roosevelt memorabilia, loaned his collection to the college for an archives exhibit to coincide with Crowe Academy. Gordner graduated from Hanover College in 1962.

Other speakers lecturing at Crowe Academy were Michael McGerr, Paul V. McNutt Professor of History at Indiana University; Daniel P. Murphy, Hanover College professor and director of the Center for Free Inquiry, who is working on a book about Theodore Roosevelt; Matthew Vosmeier, associate professor at Hanover College and associate director and program director of Crowe Academy, who, along with Murphy, planned the event; and Carla Williams, head of user services at the William and Gayle Cook Music Library at Indiana University in Bloomington. Williams specializes on music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries playing the fortepiano, harpsichord and organ.

Crowe Academy, which began in the summer of 1999, is a component of the Center for Free Inquiry that brings intellectual and cultural offerings of the college to wider audiences. Named after John Finley Crowe, the founder of Hanover College, Crowe Academy explores historical topics that in the past have included: "Life on the River," a study of Mark Twain; Benjamin Franklin, American Sage; Abraham Lincoln: Now He Belongs to the Ages; The Native American in History and Myth; Crowe Academy Celebrates the 200th Anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition; America in World War II; and Civil War in Kentuckiana.

Up to 100 participants are accepted into the Crowe Academy each summer, said Marsha Ahrens, administrative director for the Center for Free Inquiry. The numbers vary according to the topic, she said.

Next June, Crowe Academy will focus on "Great Explorers - from Christopher Columbus to the Astronauts." For more information on registering or to be put on the mailing list, contact Ahrens at (812) 866-6848 or visit cfi@hanover.edu