

The Surry County Law Enforcement History Exhibit opened at the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History Saturday with a history talk titled "Countdown to Tragedy? 1972 Surry County Sheriff's Department Hostage Standoff." The event was an example of history shared is history remembered.

The talk included first-hand accounts of the standoff, which was featured by national news media. Hostages and officers in attendance were David Beal, C.R. "Ronnie" Davis, Mike Hensley, Wallace Creed, Mitchell Davis, Ila White and C.R. "Pete" Gillespie. Justin Stirewalt served as moderator for the history talk.

Museum Executive Director Matthew Edwards credited the work of Stirewalt's own personal collection of law enforcement memorabilia for forming the bulk of the exhibit.

"Historically, a lot of the gear for law enforcement had to be purchased by the officers themselves," said Stirewalt. "Up until the mid-1970s sheriff's deputy's had to buy their own cars. You'd be surprised what turns up in people's closets. Some departments have been holding on to items, but a great deal of the early history has been lost. What is here is a snapshot of the profession from the 1950s to late 1980s."

He said law enforcement training early on was mostly what officers could learn on the street compared to training standards today. Stirewalt said Basic Law Enforcement Training now involves 600 hours of training. He opened the talk by thanking the packed room for "coming out to see what was in your closets."

Panelists White, Davis, Creed and Hensley were hostages in the incident which occurred in October of 1972. Roy Duncan had returned to the office after filing a missing persons report for his wife, Faye.

White said he returned, casually carrying a shotgun as if he was going to register the weapon, which was a common practice then. She said Duncan pointed the gun at her and demanded help finding his wife. Staffer Karen Allen, who was also on duty, calmly pushed the alarm pedal. Creed heard the alarm dispatched and responded to the call, entering the office through a side

door.

“He was sitting behind the desk with a shotgun when I came in,” recalled Creed. “He told me to give him my pistol and there was nothing else I could do.” Davis was the next deputy to arrive. Davis explained how Duncan later ordered him to “go get a pill to keep him awake” and then, suspecting a trick, made him take half the capsule with scalding hot coffee.

Frustration was evident as Davis recalled how he was powerless to help his partner, who later left and came back with balloons to comfort a 4-year-old girl who accompanied Duncan and made everyone nervous by playing with the cocked shotgun Duncan held. All agreed they were certain someone was going to be shot accidentally. Creed had been given another pistol he concealed in his back pocket.

Meanwhile, the area around the office filled with crowds, media, sharpshooters and officers from surrounding departments. Eventually, some hostages were released. Faye Duncan was located and brought to the scene. Prior to this Beal, who was a State Bureau of Investigation agent, heard the call and helped officers with his knowledge of Mount Airy to help direct the overall strategy.

Officers who had brought Faye Duncan from High Point arrived and in short order Duncan agreed to give up pistols and the shotgun. The two were allowed to talk and reportedly at 1:52 that afternoon, Duncan was escorted out to the patrol car and the standoff was over.

The exhibit includes items from Surry County Sheriff’s Office, Surry County Constable, Mount Airy Police Department, Elkin Police Department, Pilot Mountain Police Department, Dobson Police Department, Surry County E-911 Communications, Surry Community College Campus Police, Surry County Animal Control, and Boggs Patrol Service.

This exhibit will run through mid February 2015. Interested persons may visit www.northcarolinamuseum.org for museum hours.