

# Orange Oracle

An electronic update from the Orange County Historical Society

## 2023 programs update

> **Sunday, March 26, 3 p.m.**

### Knights of the Golden Horseshoe

Ann Miller has refreshed and revised a program she originally presented in 2016 about the famous expedition that Gov. Alexander Spotswood led in 1716 over the Blue Ridge Mountains. Because the society's auditorium is still in a shambles, this program will be held in the Pine Room of the Orange Baptist Church (123 West Main St., Orange). Please enter through the door facing the former Bank of America building.

> **Sunday, April 16, 3 p.m.**

### Montpelier Archaeology with Matt Reeves

A joint gathering of the Orange County African American Historical Society and OCHS. Matt will present his program in the Grand Salon at the Visitor's Center at James Madison's Montpelier. Afterwards, he'll lead a tour of the overseer's house.

> **Sunday, April 30, 3 p.m.**

### History of Clore Furniture

*(Location to be determined)*

> **Sunday, May 28, 4 p.m.**

### Traditional Blacksmithing

> **Sunday, June 25, 6 p.m.**

### Mayhurst

> **Sunday, July 30, 6 p.m.**

### Grymes School 75th Anniversary

> **Sunday, August 27, 6 p.m.**

### Woodley History



PHOTO BY PHIL AUDIBERT

## Lafayette sign changed

Recently a new sign honoring the Marquis de Lafayette's historic visit to Orange in 1824 was installed in front of the Society's Research Center on Caroline Street. To our surprise, the wording had been changed without any prior consultation. The phrase, "He dined at home of former VA Gov. James Barbour" is misleading, if not inaccurate. Historic records seem to make it clear that Madison, Lafayette and about 200 others dined somewhere in Orange Courthouse.

The wording on the sign may lead people to believe that they went to Barboursville to dine at Gov. Barbour's home there. According to Ann Miller, who has taken the trouble to go through Robert Ward's 1881 publication about both Lafayette tours (1824 and 1825), there is no mention of the Marquis ever visiting Barboursville on Nov. 19, 1824. The Society plans to contact the William C. Pomeroy Foundation to determine why the change was made and how it can be corrected. 'Stay tuned' as we follow this story.

Here is the original wording of the sign:

**LAFAYETTE'S TOUR**  
ON NOV. 19, 1824, GENERAL  
LAFAYETTE DINED IN  
ORANGE ON HIS WAY  
FROM MONTPELIER TO  
FREDERICKSBURG. HE VISITED  
AGAIN ON AUGUST 22, 1825.

# George Gaines (1849 - 1910)

## Orange's wealthy entrepreneur

By Ray Ezell

George Gaines is most noted as the owner of a succession of saloons, "soft-drink" parlors, and pool rooms in downtown Orange, mostly along Railroad Avenue. He was issued several licenses to conduct retail sales of liquor over a 30-year career that started in 1871.

It appears that his earliest establishment was called the Oak Hall Saloon, which sold tobacco as well as intoxicants. This saloon was destroyed by the March 1889 fire that burned a large swath of downtown. However, in April 1889, he was issued a new license to dispense liquor, and he quickly resumed his operation. In 1895, Gaines acquired the building along the railroad just south of the Levy Building known as the Johnson Block. This was the same building that served as the Orange County courthouse before the present courthouse was constructed in 1859.



In January 1903, Gaines became a charter member of the Orange Library Association, which directed the affairs of Orange's first public library. After a brief ban on the sale of spirits within the town limits, brought on by a temperance-minded local judge, Gaines opened a new saloon in the rear of the Daley Building (the south end of the present Levy Building) on Railroad Avenue. His saloon sold a variety of whiskies, brandies, wines, and champagne, as well as medicinal whiskey. In 1906, he accidentally poisoned himself, but suffered

no long lasting adverse effects. By 1908, he was operating a pool room and saloon in the building now known as the Sherman Building (Miller Law Firm). These facilities were destroyed during the downtown fire of 1908. After the fire, he quickly rebuilt the Gaines Building and reopened his saloon.

George Gaines died in January 1910. He left a considerable fortune and properties valued at about \$70,000 to his apparent housekeeper, Rose Henshaw, a Black woman who lived in his house for the previous 20 years as his common law wife. Henshaw and Gaines had two sons from their union. Gaines' sister, Annie E. Morris, contested the will but relented after Henshaw tripled her bequest to \$3,000 and produced a marriage certificate to the court verifying her secret wedding to Gaines in Washington, DC a number of years prior.



Pictured at top is a 1878 map showing the location of the Gaines Saloon and at bottom a photo of the Gaines Building after the 1908 fire.

# 50 years ago...

*From the files of the Orange County Review*

**A**ug. 29, 1966, U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Norman Wells was shot down in his F-105 aircraft and taken prisoner of war in North Vietnam on his 78th mission. It was the second time he'd been shot down in less than 10 days. Captured by Vietnamese militia, he was held as a prisoner of war for more than six and a half years.

On Saturday, March 17, 1973, Wells' adopted hometown of Unionville, VA welcomed him home. "Unionville wore its heart on its sleeve the day Lt. Col. Norman Wells came home," the *Orange County Review* story read. "Amid a sea of U.S. flags, surrounded by TV cameras, the hamlet's people stood tall and proud Saturday giving a hero's welcome to the Air Force veteran who had returned only 10 days before from a prison camp in Vietnam."

The *Review* described Wells, 40, as "boyish looking" and noted a welcoming crowd of approximately 1,000, despite the windy and brisk St. Patrick's Day weather. "An enormous red and white welcome banner, slated to ride aloft between two 40-foot poles, could not be put up because of severe winds and was instead draped aboard a huge fire truck." The materials for the "outsize pennant" had been given by American Silk Mills with high school students cutting out the letters and Mrs. Thomas Willoughby doing the stitching, the *Review* reported.

"Through all the bleak years, I always knew that some day I'd be coming back and Unionville would be waiting for me," Lt. Col. Wells said amid rousing cheers and applause. "With a quiet, somber smile, he paid tribute to his wife, Barbara, for the way she stood by him and the wonderful job she'd done raising their children," the paper added. "It was a whale of a day for all concerned," the *Review* concluded.



MARCH 22, 1973, ORANGE COUNTY REVIEW  
**Happiness is coming home. The faces of Lt. Col. and Mrs. Norman Wells reflect their feelings at a gala gathering in the former POW's honor on St. Patrick's Day.**

## National Genealogical Society Conference

Richmond, VA May 31 - June 4

An invitation to learn more about re-searching your family history! The Virginia Genealogical Society invites you to join them for the National Genealogical Society



2023 Family History Conference in Richmond, May 31- June 4, 2023. An amazing variety of lectures and special events are planned

with an emphasis on the theme, "Virginia, Deep Roots of a Nation." For more information, go to <https://www.vgs.org/event/ngs-2023-family-history-conference/> or contact local VGS Board members, Mike or May Saxton, at [saxton-family@comcast.net](mailto:saxton-family@comcast.net).

## Call for volunteers

We are looking for four volunteers to serve on the outreach committee. This group will develop a marketing plan and enact, as necessary, methods to publicize OCHS programs, initiatives and products. The committee will continue to support the *Oracle* and the "History-to-Go" YouTube channel, as well as the Society website. If you are interested and/or have any questions, please email volunteer coordinator May Saxton at [OCHistVolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:OCHistVolunteers@gmail.com).

## Book signing BOLO

Probably sometime in April, the Orange County Historical Society will host a book signing for its latest release, *Old Blue Run Baptist Church, the First One Hundred Years*. Authored by Somerset historian Garland Tyree, the 94-page book takes a detailed look at Orange County's oldest still-standing church; a church that can rightfully claim to be a cradle of religious freedom. The book is available for sale at the research center (130 Caroline St., Orange) and online at [www.orangecovahist.org](http://www.orangecovahist.org).