

April 2 Update (in lieu of meeting)

We don't know when we will next be able to have a face-to-face meeting, so this email will update you since our last email in February.

**Esmont History Book** first draft is done! There will be other drafts and there is lots of work yet to be done. Assuming we are successful in getting a follow-up grant from Virginia Humanities to cover the manuscript production costs, we should have the finished product available in early 2021.

The mystery of the **Esmont West postmark** has been solved. For about two years, including 1906, there was an Esmont Post Office at the intersection of Porters Road and Irish Road. Not sure why it was there or why it was taken away. The original building is no longer there.

We are working on a response to the owner of **Purvis Store**, nothing to report at this time.

Anna Boeschstein who heads up our Trails Committee has submitted a schedule for completing the Trail Master Plan which is funded by the BAMA Funds Grant we received. During the month of July preliminary GIS data will be collected to include topography, vegetative cover, property ownership, and notification of stakeholders. Public meetings will be held in July and August. Using all data collected, the master plan, trail alignment and map will be developed during the month of August.

Below is a link to a nice article about Friends of Esmont written by Pat Healy who writes for the Scottsville Monthly. The article appeared in the March 20 edition of the paper.

<https://fluvannareview.com/2020/03/march-20-2020/>

Diane Pullaro provided two old newspaper articles regarding the last day of the passenger train service in Esmont, which have been retyped for easy reading, and a History of Alberene written in 1989 by Lurlein Kidd. They are linked below, I think you will enjoy reading them.

## **Tiny Nelson and Albemarle Railway Closes Out Sixty Years of Service**

*By Nancy St. Clair, Progress Staff Reporter, January 5, 1963*

Schuyler – This tiny Nelson County community witnessed the end of an era Saturday .

The Nelson and Albemarle Railroad, in operation for 60 years, made its last run. The old iron horse which carried soapstone from the Alberene Stone Co. has been replaced by tractor-trailer trucks that have been found more economical.

Retiring along with the train are Jake Tree, the fireman who worked for the company 37 years, and H.M. Hackett, the engineer, who saw 53 years with the company.

The railroad's diesel engine and a caboose were sent on the last run from Schuyler to Warren and back Saturday. It stopped at Esmont to pick up its final load – three cars of pulpwood.

A small crowd gathered for the event. The conductor swung to the right on the steps of the red caboose, gave the signal and the train lumbered away from the Schuyler station for the last time.

The N&A owns seven and three quarters miles of track to Guthrie where the lines are met by Chesapeake and Ohio track.

The train, its long-time operations and visitors, rambled through the snow-covered woods. It stopped over a creek bridge to give the visitors a chance to examine a beaver dam. The men have watched the progress on the dam on their daily runs and pointed out where the beavers had cut down nearby trees.

The engine and caboose pulled off again and shortly came upon two deer hunters and a freshly shot deer. Arms flew from the cab and caboose to wave.

An old-timer, retired since 1959, familiarly climbed to one of the four seats in the top of the caboose to take a last ride down the tracks which he rode almost daily for 42 years.

Two boys sitting near him listened eagerly as he recalled the old train's history. "I saw them digging the bed for this train with mules when I as a boy," H.L. Drumheller reminisced.

"The most cars we ever carried was about 17 or 18," he said. I was the brakeman from 1917 to 1931. Then I was the conductor from 1931 to 1959. The conductor handles the

bills and keeps the records of freight. He's the boss of the train. He's like the captain of a ship, Drumheller said.

The train had only one fatal accident during its 60 years and it was only five years ago when JB Purvis was hit by a truck as he stood on the front of the engine while it was stopped at the Rt. 6 crossing at Esmont.

Both Tyree and Hackett have missed the old steam engines which were junked in 1951 for diesel. "This is nice, it's just like driving my car," Hackett said. "It's much cleaner. Do you think I'd look like this if we still had steam? I'd be all covered with coal dust and soot," he said glancing down at his clean shirt and corduroy jacket.

But being clean is a poor substitute for the old steam engines according to the two men. "You could play 'Home Sweet Home' on a steam engine whistle," Hackett grinned, "but you can't do anything with a diesel whistle."

Tyree added, "I liked to see the smoke and watch those old drivers turn." Is he ready to retire? "I've worked enough, I reckon," he said.

Tyree said he started working for the Alberene Stone Co., as a water boy when he was 12 years old. "I worked for five cents an hour," he recollected. Hackett first worked in the quarry.

Frank G. Mothes, vice president of Alberene Stone Co, said that the decision to scrap the railroad was made because 85% of the stone already was being shipped by truck.

Truck freighting isn't actually cheaper, he explained, but handling costs and breakage are reduced by truck. Shipping by train necessitates using a truck to move the stone from the railroad to the construction site whereas a truck can take the stone directly to the purchaser.

The caboose and track will be sold to dealers in used railroad equipment. Bids are due Jan. 15, J.F. Bickers, Jr., trainmaster for the C&O who was present for the last run, said the C&O has applied to the Interstate Commerce Commission to take out their half of the tracks from Guthrie to Warren. He said the tracks don't support their upkeep. The train ran four passenger and baggage coaches at one time but passenger service was discontinued in 1950.

A BRIEF  
EARLY HISTORY  
of  
ALBERENE  
AS REMEMBERED  
by  
LURLEIN C. KIDD

August 15, 1989  
10751 Starlight Ct.  
Riverside, CA 92505

I was born Daisy Lurlein Cook in Alberene in October, 1910. Alberene, originally a small Albemarle County township named Beaverdam, was also the birthplace of the Alberene Soapstone Company, the singlemost important influence in the early growth and later demise of the community. Even the name, Alberene, reflects the interrelationship. The first three letters of Albemarle County and the "rene" from James Serene, the founder of the soapstone company, together form Alberene.

James Serene was originally in the marble business in Vermont, and was attracted to Virginia by the discovery of soapstone deposits. (I am not sure of the exact dates of the discovery.) Serene got in touch with a man named Schurtz who was thought to be the owner of the property where the soapstone deposit was located. Serene asked Schurtz to send soapstone samples to Vermont. When the samples did not arrive, Serene returned to Virginia and bought the property. It was believed that Serene was a purchase agent for Dan J. Carroll, a New York box manufacturer. A Mr. Boswick financed the purchase for Carroll and Serene. (The soapstone company records do not have any information about Boswick.) The company records state that D.J. Carroll was the first president of the development company, and also mention that one John G. Forter was a pioneer in the early exploitation of the soapstone deposits.

James Serene began removing the stone from the quarry about 1890. The stone was cut by gang saws into slabs. The slabs were hauled to North Garden, Virginia, by ox teams. Three wagons, each drawn by six oxen, made one trip each day. Austin Spears, a Caucasian, and Blacks Burl Thomas and Loftus Johnson were the ox team drivers.

The slabs were made into laundry tubs in North Garden by Andrew Sutherland.

Later, mule teams replaced the oxen, and two trips a day were made to North Garden. The mule skimmers were Blacks Casear Smith and Henry Turner.

Housing for the soapstone workers and their families was erected in "Villages" under the direction of Sam Purcell of Greenwood. The villages were given picturesque names such as Dogtown, Stumptown, Quality Row, Gospel Hill, Church Hill, Sand Road, and Carter's Field. Company officials lived on Maple Avenue.

Some of the first Alberene Soapstone Company officials were:

D. J. Carroll, President

James Serene, Manager

M. J. Flynn (nephew of Carroll), Time Keeper

Philo Felter, Office Manager

Presno (only name given), Quarry Foreman

(Sidney Giannini, not employed by the company, was Justice of the Peace at Alberene.)

Around 1902 or 1903, Serene left for New York, and Henry Lane of Esmont became the company Superintendent. Lane built the branch railroad from Esmont to Alberene. He also built the big "Company House" (which still exists today ). The first story of the house is made of soapstone. Lane left the soapstone company to build the Virginia Railroad in the town of Altavista, located in Campbell County at the intersection of the Virginia and Southern Railroad tracks.

A large soapstone deposit was also found in 1890 near Schuyler (just across the Albemarle County line in Nelson County). A man named Ponton showed the deposits to Captain J. W. Foster, a civil engineer helping to lay out the town of Howardsville. (Captain Foster served with Mosby's Rangers in the Civil War.) It is said that Foster was in the Schuyler area to settle land disputes. Captain Foster began soapstone mining operations at the large Schuyler deposit. D. J. Carroll, first President of the Alberene Soapstone Company, bought Captain Foster's company and moved the Alberene's company operations from Alberene to Schuyler. Work at the Alberene quarry was discontinued in 1916.

A new grinding plant was built at Schuyler at the then enormous cost of over \$100,000 to replace the old facility at Damon (which was then abandoned). There were about 450 employees at the Schuyler mill and quarries, and two or three generations of several families were on the payroll. (A fact probably attributable more to the lenient credit policies of the "company store," the commissary, than to loyalty. Though many, no doubt, "owed their soul to the company store," in 35 years the company had no serious labor disputes.)

A small railroad carried workers from Alberene to Schuyler. Others were picked up along the way. The railroad, the Nelson and Albemarle (also known as the N and A), also carried passengers. The company also furnished transportation for employees and school children from Rockfish to Schuyler.

Around 1930 another corporation was formed to manage the Schuyler soapstone mining operations. Some of the officers were:

John S. Graves, President

Dewey R. Fortune, Vice President, Production

Hugh M. Mathews, Vice President and Treasurer

C. E. Deane, Secretary

Percy Thacker, Assistant Secretary

In 1956, The Georgia Marble Company acquired controlling interest of the entire operation. (I believe a more recent acquisition was made by a Swedish firm.)

About soapstone...

The formal geology label for soapstone is "steatite."

While all kinds of soapstone are a form of talc, the Alberene-Nelson stone is different in character and in the uses to which it is adapted from the soft soapstone of China and other countries. The Alberene-Nelson soapstone is weatherproof, heatproof, timeproof, acidproof, non-staining, and non-absorbent. Practically all research and chemical laboratories use the Alberene soapstone equipment. Electrical companies used the stone for mounting high tension apparatus. It is also widely used for stair treads, kitchen and laundry sinks, and hot plates. When it is highly polished it takes on the appearance of marble and is used for decorative effects in buildings.

The name "Alberene," sometimes used without capitalization, has come to be applied to soapstone of the Alberene-Nelson type wherever found. Deposits have been found in Sweden, Canada, and on the west coast of the United States. The deposits are small and none

are being exploited commercially.

American Indians in the Aplerene/Schuyler locality were the first to use the soapstone, mostly for utensils and bowls. James Serene was the first to recognize the commercial possibilities of Virginia soapstone. D. J. Carroll is called the father of the industry and he expanded the uses of the stone.

Schuyler remains the only successful operation in the world for the quarrying and processing of the Alberene-type of hard soapstone.



**PART SOAPSTONE HOUSE** — The first floor of this building, built at Alberene around the turn of the century, is made of soapstone. The structure, abandoned for some years, formerly was the "company house" (office) of the Alberene Stone Corporation of Virginia. Operations of the corporation shifted from Alberene to Schuyler in 1916. Many of the soapstone quarry and plant workers continued to live in Alberene while working in Schuyler. —Progress photo by Loving.



**ALBERENE SOAPSTONE PIONEERS** — A man named Boswick (center) and James Serene (right) played important roles in the commercial development of the soapstone deposit at Alberene. John Lewis Martin of Faber, who said he knew the two men, identified them. Martin said Boswick, a New Yorker, helped finance the development and Serene, a Vermonter, was manager. P. M. Jones (left) of Culpeper was not associated with the operation but was a friend of the other two men. He had been a member of Ashby's and Mosby's "raiders" during the Civil War and married Sally Martin, daughter of Dr. George Martin, of North Garden.

—Photo about 1900.

# Waynesboro News-Virginian

## Monday, February 6, 1950

### N & A Makes Final Passenger Trip

#### Little Traffic Closes 15-Mile, 2-County Line By Pat Velenovsky - News-Virginian Staff Writer

The Nelson and Albemarle Railway closed down its passenger service Saturday afternoon, but the train crew won't be lonesome because of the lack of passengers.

"We aren't used to having many", Conductor H.L. Drumheller pointed out. And no passengers is really the rule rather than the exception on the line which travels between Schuyler in Nelson County and Warren in Albemarle.

But Saturday was the exception. Members of the Old Dominion Railway Club, new men, photographers and residents of the area crowded the coach for the final trip.

#### One of Shortest

Completed in 1905 the N&A is one of the shortest railroads in Virginia, and one of the most famous. We were looking for history so Conductor Drumheller took the time out after collecting tickets to supply the information.

Pushing his cap back on his head he pointed out that the line once ran separate freight and passenger trains. "Until Aug. 28, 1947 we ran a train over to Rockfish. That was originally an electric line."

Number 9, which was pulling the train, and Number 10, he informed us, appeared in the picture "Virginia." "And that fellow Beebe, Lucius\* I think his name was, came through here while he was writing a book of shortlines railroads."

Mr. Beebe according to Conductor Drumheller, said that the N&A is one of the few lines in the U.S. stuck using the old saddle-tank locomotive.

The side-saddle tank, in case you've never seen one, looks exactly like its name. The water tank, usually in the tender, is slung across the boiler, and the coal is carried in the end of the locomotive.

Following Conductor Drumheller and Brakeman Critzer through the coach we learned other things of interest. In addition to being one of the shortest lines in existence, 15 miles from Schuyler to Warren, it also has an enviable accident record.

## **One Accident**

There has been only one serious accident since the line began operation. Soon after the road began running, a coach turned over near Esmont and one passenger was killed. "He was an employee of the road, but he wasn't working that day."

Never has snow stopped a single train, but there was a 60-day period in 1944 when no trains ran because of washouts.

Engineer J.C. Mayo pulled Number 9 out of Schuyler at 11 a.m. and headed up the three percent grade for Esmont running between 12 and 20 miles per hour.

Because of grade freight cars are divided into two groups. "We've already been to Esmont once today with some cars", said Mr. Drumheller.

The round-trip from Schuyler to Warren and back is made once a day, so no light is needed in the coach which the line borrows from the Chesapeake and Ohio. But just in case any should be needed there is one kerosene lantern on the coach wall.

Heat is supplied by a pot-bellied stove bolted to the floor. This is fed by coal from a built-in bin.

## **Bring Lunch**

Arriving at Esmont the engine dropped its passenger coach and took several cars to the nearby soapstone quarry. The passengers who brought lunch took the opportunity to eat, while others scoured the grocery stores for loaves of bread, sliced meat, and other kinds of food.

Not to be outdone in courtesy by the other members of the crew, Engineer Mayo offered to share his lunch with some of his hungry passengers.

At 12:55 the N&A's last passenger train headed for Warren and a connection with the C&O.

Just about one-half hour north of Boiling Spring two deer jumped from over and raced ahead of the engine for a short time before heading into the woods.

While photographers scrambled for shots Number 9 dropped cars, picked up others, took on water, and broke an air hose connection. This took about ten minutes to fix, and everything was set for the trip back.

No train trip would be complete without the passengers running to catch the train, and three supplied the final touch by having to sprint down the track to catch Number 9 as she pulled out.

Shaking his head sadly, but grinning all the while Brakeman Critzer pulled the emergency cord to stop the train. Puffing mightily the three were pulled aboard. "We thought you were going to wait for the C&O", panted one. "It was late", stated Mr. Critzer as he gave the signal for the interrupted trip to begin again.

The trip back to Schuyler was smooth and uneventful except for the occasional flash of a flash bulb.

## **Big Haul**

Conductor Drumheller sat talking to Brakeman Critzer while counting his tickets and fare. "Took in \$17.71 today", he said. "More than we took in during the entire month sometimes. Fifty-six passengers today. Some weeks we didn't even have one."

Number 9 pulled into the station and the passengers got off. "It's been nice having you fellows riding with us", Brakeman Critzer remarked. "Don't wait until we stop something again before you come back." "Sure hate to see her go", said Fireman A.L. Drumheller.

Dropping the cars Engineer Mayo backed Number 9 into the roundhouse. The last passenger trip of the Nelson and Albemarle Railway was over.

## \*Lucius Beebe

**Intro by Peggy Denby:** Seeing the name "Lucius Beebe" in the article, we wondered who he was. In fact, he was quite something in the Railroad world, and in many other worlds, as you will read below.

Bon vivant, railroad historian, photographer, pioneering food critic, chronicler of New York's café society, and noted newspaperman, Lucius Beebe (1902–1966) was an American original. In 1938, with the publication of *High Iron: A Book of Trains*, he transformed the world of railroad-subject photography forever by inventing the railroad picture book genre. In 1940, he met creative and life partner Charles Clegg (1916–1979), also a talented photographer. Beebe and Clegg produced an outstanding and diverse portfolio of mid-twentieth century railroad-subject photographs. Beebe, sometimes with Clegg, also authored about forty books, including many focused-on railroads and railroading.

The *Railroad Photography of Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg* brings their incredible story and best photographic work together. Providing an extensive biographic introduction to Beebe and Clegg, author Tony Reevy presents a multi-faceted view of the railroad industry that will appeal to rail enthusiasts as well as those interested in American food culture, the history of New York City, and LGBT studies. The *Railroad Photography of Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg* is an indispensable history to the work of two men who forever changed the way we see and experience American railroads.

To learn more about Lucius Beebe, copy and paste this URL into your search browser:  
<https://www.diffordsguide.com/people/51732/celebrity-drinker/lucius-beebe>

## Photos



**Number 9** moves toward a siding at Warren to drop cars and pick up others. The combination passenger-mail-express cars shown in the foreground. (News-Virginian Staff Photo)



**"Lots of passengers today."** Conductor H.L. Drumheller tells Brakeman J.P. Critzer. They are standing in the mail-express section of the passenger coach. (News-Virginian Staff Photo)



**Pot-bellied stove** warms Carl Holt and F.L. Dean, passengers from Esmont, as they discuss former trips on the N&A. (News-Virginian Staff Photo)



**Engineer J.C. Mayo** (top) as Mrs. William Heath, acting Esmont Postmistress, and Fireman A.L. Drumheller talk of the days when Mrs. Heath's father-in-law was a depot agent on the line. (News-Virginian Staff Photo)