

# Newsletter

## Orange County Historical Society

June 2007

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### Maria Marshall, An Orange County “Mission Lady”

*Frank S. Walker, Jr.*

**A**BOUT MID-WAY ALONG the south wall of St. Thomas’ Episcopal Church in the town of Orange, Virginia, is a large bronze plaque. It reads, “In loving memory of Maria Newton Marshall, born January 3, 1869 – died April 3, 1934. Freely she gave her time and talents in the service of her Master. A loyal and faithful worker in her own Parish and a dedicated missionary to the mountains of Virginia.” The plaque was given in 1935 in Ms. Marshall’s honor by the Women’s Auxiliary and other members of the church.

Fortunately, St. Thomas’ has been blessed with many loyal and faithful workers over the years, but there was obviously something about Maria Marshall that called for special recognition and remembering. The second part of the commendation had to be the key. But a “missionary to the mountains of Virginia”? What was she doing? More to the point, why? To learn the story of “Miss Maria,” or “Polly” Marshall, as she was known to friends and family, we first need to know something about the work of a pair of Episcopal ministers. To a large extent, their stories tell hers.

In 1888, the English-born, Oxford-educated, and recently-ordained Frederick W. Neve arrived in Albemarle County, Virginia, to serve as the Rector of both St. Paul’s, Ivy, and Emmanuel, Greenwood. Reverend Neve had been seeking the life of a missionary, and while the usual posts of China and Africa were doubtless considered, it was the plight of those two tiny Episcopal churches backed up against the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia that won him over. Their memberships and finances had been ravaged by the Civil War, and the two churches had been “yoked,” to be served by one priest, in 1868. That arrangement would not end until after the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Soon after Reverend Neve arrived, he began to hear about the people living up in the mountains behind his churches. For a description of those people, we add the voice of the Reverend

Watkins Leigh Ribble who, a few years later, also went up to serve in those mountains: “It seemed to be a Never Never Land where little had changed for a hundred and fifty years and which both civilization and history had by-passed. The glacierlike movement of population from the eastern seaboard westward had spread over Appalachia and moved on, leaving behind in the valleys, coves, and hollows, ground moraines of people, who had no significant part in the commercial, industrial, and cultural development of the country. The rugged terrain, the absence of good roads, the lack of skills for develop-

ing the slender resources of a difficult environment, and the dearth of creative contacts with the outside world, locked them into enclaves where they long remained virtually undisturbed. They were severed from the dynamic life of a growing nation of which they knew less and less, and feared more and more. So little were they a part of it that they regarded themselves as surrounded by foreigners and felt safe only in their own isolation.”

It was into their world that Neve ventured, getting to know some of the people, letting them get to know him. Actually, it did not take long for one of those hollows to say, yes, they wouldn’t mind having a school and a church, and from that things took off. From the first mission near Simmon’s Gap, above Shifflett’s Hollow, in 1900, the Mountain Mission project grew into 28 mission churches and 16 schools as rapidly as the workers and money could be found.



This photograph shows Fielding Lewis Marshall and his second wife Mary Newton Thomas, plus a few of his nineteen children. It was taken in 1898, behind the Ballard-Marshall House on Main Street, Orange. The back row (L to R) includes Barry, Nannie, George, George’s wife, Walton, Maria, and Nellie. Seated (L to R) are Sophy, Randolph, Mary T., Evelyn, Fielding L., and Alice. Photo courtesy of Alice Marshall King Smith (Mrs. O. Kendall).

See **Marshall** on page 2.

## Marshall (*continued*)

As it turned out, the church got into the mountains barely in time to prepare its residents for wrenching changes to their traditional way of life. In 1925 President Calvin Coolidge signed the legislation leading to the creation of the Shenandoah National Park, and the mountains began to be depopulated. Roads also began to bring the outside world into the mountains, while taking the children out to face it at local public schools. By 1933, only two of the mission schools were still operating. Today, only one, much changed, survives: Blue Ridge School at Dyke VA.

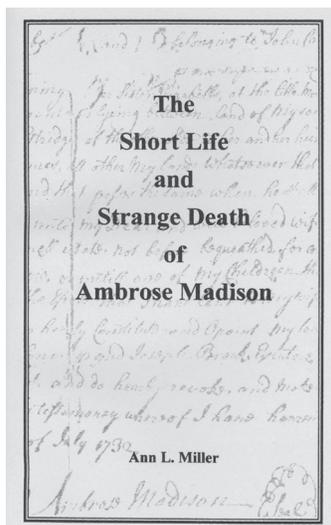
In order to find his first teacher, Reverend Neve advertised in the *Southern Churchman*, a statewide Episcopal Church publication. He solicited the application of some young man who would be willing to devote himself to the hard work, loneliness and deprivations of mission life. His advertisement was answered by fifteen young women. He hired one, and the mission project was off and running. While a few young men did join the effort over the years, it was the women who turned out in numbers to make Neve's dream a reality. One of them was Maria Newton Marshall, and Reverend Ribble's description of the "Mission Lady" comes close to describing her exactly:

"A profile of the average woman worker would conform to this outline: between forty and fifty-five years old; unmarried or widowed; high school education or better; with prior experience in some field, e.g., church work, social service or teaching school; volunteered for a limited time but was liable to carry on until retirement. She was deeply dedicated; had an intense sympathy for the poor and under-privileged; was very adaptable, dogged; accepted privation and sacrifice without complaint; was steady in the face of danger or crisis; ready to respond to calls for help; occasionally likely to be soft-hearted when sternness was required; a bit naïve; and was greatly loved and respected by the mountain people, who were very protective toward her." Is it any wonder that Reverend Ribble wound up marrying one of the Mission Ladies?

The tradition around St. Thomas' is that Maria first went into the mountains in 1903. It's possible, then, that she was on Reverend Neve's original list of applicants, but we don't know. She was still only 34 in 1903, and maybe she was held back a year or two. In any event, Maria was fully qualified. As an experienced teacher and church worker, and as a member of a large family that had its own heritage of Civil War-produced deprivations, Maria wasn't going to see anything she couldn't handle. Over the years, she taught at more than a half-dozen of the mission schools, then during the awful flu epidemic of 1918, her performance as a nurse to the stricken mountain folk brought her special praise and recognition. She took an academic year off here and there and taught down in the "flatlands," but her heart remained in the Blue Ridge. Like a war hero home on leave, she was held in awe by the locals as someone doing great deeds in foreign lands.

Finally in 1922 Maria had to take an extended leave of absence from the mission field to nurse her aging mother. The family had assigned her that duty years earlier, and for a time Maria had discharged it by taking her mother up into the mountains with her. By 1922, however, Mary Newton Marshall was 80 years old, and the rigors of mission life were beyond her strength. By the time of her mother's death in 1928, mission schools were already closing, and Maria did not return to her beloved mountains.

Maria's mother had lived to age 86, and her father to age 83, but possibly the hard years of mission work were the reason that Maria departed this life at age 65. In any event, the members of St. Thomas' Church made sure that she would not be forgotten, and the plaque was dedicated. Maria Newton Marshall was thus properly honored as a hero and as a shining example to others. We of the present day could do no better than to stand instructed by that example.



## Hot off the Press!

The second printing of *The Short Life and Strange Death of Ambrose Madison*, by Ann L. Miller, has just arrived at the research center. The price remains the same (\$11.95, with 10% off for members, plus tax). Ambrose, as you will recall, was James Madison, Jr.'s grandfather and the patriarch of the Madison family in Orange County. This compelling monograph tells of his life, and the even more intriguing story of his death by poisoning.

## The Signing Tree

*Jack Miller*

On the downhill side of this ancient beechnut tree, enormous roots are visible clawing into fertile Davidson soil. While I can't say how old it is, it was already a mature tree when, according to local lore, Confederate soldiers carved their messages on its parchment-like skin. During the winter of 1863-1864, General Samuel P. McGowan's South Carolina Brigade was encamped less than a half mile away, and they would have had ample opportunity to visit the site. Moreover, it is possible that the soldiers may not have been the first – beech trees are very long-lived and especially suited for carvings. Daniel Boone inscribed his famous declaration “D. Boone cilled a bar on tree in 1760” on a beech tree in Tennessee. Whenever it began, it became the practice of succeeding generations to enshrine their own special graffiti until all the lower reaches of the tree were filled with signings.

I talked with Emma Day, nee Higgins, and her brother George, who related that they and their siblings would cross Montford (a corruption of Montfort) Road to play under the cool canopy of the tree and climb up on massive limbs that swooped nearly to the ground. Emma, referring to the tree as her childhood McDonald's playground, says that she was told that her grandmother, Emma Jean Gillum, had also carved her initials on the tree. Emma Jean married George W. Higgins, of “Oakland Farm,” who, as a young lad, served as a corporal in the Orange Artillery during the Civil War. Emma also has a vague recollection of being told, when she was a child, that a Yankee spy had been hanged on the tree, but she never learned anything to corroborate this story.

The tree's fame had spread so wide that a young newspaperman, our very own Duff Green, came to Montford to write an article about it. An ever-agile Duff says that he climbed nearly to the top, but, unfortunately, he has not yet been able to locate the article he wrote some 40 to 50 years ago.

Storms and age have diminished some of the luster of the tree. The swooping limbs are gone now and most of the carvings are undecipherable. But the majestic old tree still stands, proudly exhibiting signings on its thick central core and imposing up-reaching limbs. The tree measures a little under 14 feet in circumference, less than the largest on record of more than 18 feet, but I know of no other with more carvings. George Higgins asserts that the tree's girth is no larger than when he was a youth, and maybe he is not too far off as beech trees are slow growing.

While we admire the beauty of this ancient tree, we shouldn't forget the life-supporting functions that trees serve. Trees help clean our air and water, prevent erosion, provide habitat for wildlife, and, through the process of photosynthesis, slow global warming. At a conference in 1997<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Mike Dombeck, former Chief of the U. S. Forestry Service, and professor of forestry at the University of Washington, estimated that a single mature tree may absorb (sequester) up to 26 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air and release enough oxygen for a family of four to breathe for a full year.

Now let's all go plant a tree for posterity!



Jack Miller



Jack Miller



Jack Miller

<sup>1</sup> Dombeck, M. 8th Urban Forestry Conference. Atlanta, Ga. September 18, 1997. Urban Natural Resource Stewardship: A pathway to Ecological Restoration and Social Renewal.

## A Potpourri of Programs

Over the months since the last newsletter, members of the Historical Society have been able to partake of several wonderful programs and a picnic!

### The Madison-Barbour Rural Historic District

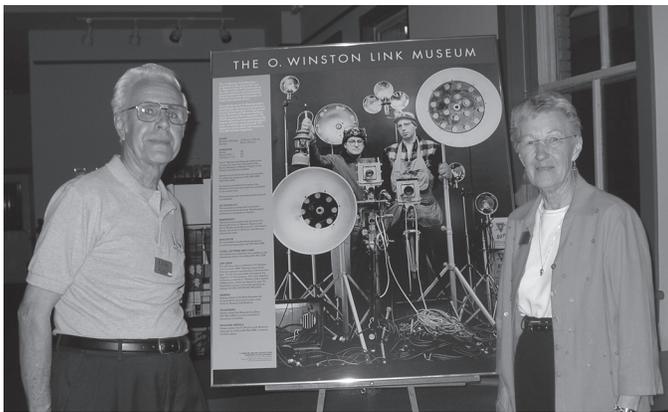
On the lovely Sunday afternoon of March 25th, more than 70 people gathered at the Old Blue Run Baptist Church in Somerset to hear Ann L. Miller speak about The Madison-Barbour Rural Historic District. Ann's talk was a joint presentation of The Friends of Barboursville and the Orange County Historical Society.

Covering much of western Orange County, the 32,500 acre Madison-Barbour Rural Historic District is one of the largest National Register-listed historic districts in Virginia and contains numerous significant buildings and sites. Ms. Miller, who has over 30 years of experience researching the history and structures in this region, was a member of the original team that documented and nominated the district to the National Register. Ann covered the story of the district's creation, as well as the history of the land and buildings within it.

After Ann's illustrated talk, a wonderful reception was held in the Church's fellowship hall, with spectacular refreshments provided by The Friends of Barboursville; coffee and other beverages were the bailiwick of the Historical Society. The feast was enjoyed by everyone, and both The Friends and the Historical Society are extremely grateful to the Blue Run Baptist Church for allowing the meeting to take place in their most historic church.

Member Bill Speiden has suggested that the Madison-Barbour Rural Historic District should have at least one, or better two, roadside markers. Seeming like a good idea, it was agreed that the procedures and cost of such signs would be researched.

### "The Last Steam Railroad in America"



Lynne Lewis

The marvelous photography of O. Winston Link (1914-2001) was the subject of our April 30 meeting, held at the Orange Train Station/Visitors Center. Bill and Ellen Arnold of the O. Winston Link Museum, located in the historic Norfolk & Western Passenger Station, in Roanoke, Virginia,

brought slides, posters and books about the man who extensively photographed "The Last Steam Railroad in America" – the Norfolk & Western in Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland.

Between 1955 and 1960, Mr. Link took more than 2,400 photographs of the N & W, and recorded the sounds of the railroad so successfully that his recordings became well-known among rail fans. Mr. Arnold regaled the enthusiastic audience, to their fascination, with the stories behind the many slides of Link's work that he showed. He described the often heroic efforts and ingenious inventions that Link employed to capture his subjects. Since Link preferred to photograph the trains by night, he often employed amazing arrays of coordinated flash mechanisms, using literally hundreds of the now old-fashioned flash bulbs for a single photograph. It was an evening enjoyed by all present. If you didn't have a chance to see this talk, you can always pay a visit to the Museum in Roanoke.

### Visualizing the Archives: Orange County Population Mapping

In conjunction with the Montpelier Slave Descendants Reunion 2007, Bob Vernon is combining land and personal property tax records with the 1870 U.S. Census to map the locations of all Orange County families recorded in that census. On June 4, he gave us a view of his work in progress during a joint meeting with the Orange County African-American Historical Society. It was exciting to see how much historical insight can be gleaned by thoughtful combination of information available from different sources.

### Arlington, Montpelier Station, Virginia

The 2007 picnic season was started in style on June 25 with a lovely evening at Arlington, part of the Montpelier property, along its west side. The showers kindly held off, and a large group assembled on the side lawn to enjoy their dinners and hear Ann Miller give a brief history of the house. Much of the Arlington tract was originally part of the Octonia grant; additional land from the Montpelier patent was sold to Reuben Newman in 1827 by James Madison, Jr. The house was finished by Newman's son in 1848. After passing through several hands between 1872 and the early 1900s, it was acquired by William duPont. For many years it served as the manager's residence for Montpelier, housing both the Craig and Hazard families.

In addition to a tour of the basement and first floor, the picnickers were treated to a video produced from late-1930s home movies donated to Montpelier and the Historical Society by the Craig daughters in the 1980s. A delightful array of clips,

See **Programs** on page 5.

### Programs *(continued)*

showing May Day celebrations at Montpelier, family scenes at Arlington and the Montpelier Supply Company were shown. A number of members were delighted to see family, friends and even Randolph Scott featured in some of the shots.



Lynne Lewis

Update: A week or so after the Arlington picnic Ann Miller, Lynne Lewis and Paul Donohue (acting as AV meister) compared the two versions (one owned by Montpelier, the other by the Historical Society) of the Craig family movies. It turned out that while there was much overlapping footage, the two videos were not identical. With that in mind, member Bob Pfile kindly agreed to take the two videos and edit them into one, combining them so that all the footage would be available on a single compact disk. The original videos will be returned to the respective holders, along with copies of the CDs. We are most grateful to Bob for undertaking this task. The CDs will serve not only as a vital backup for the videos, but as an irreplaceable visual document of a time that is fast fading from memory.

## Graves Mill to Host Civil War Memorial Ceremony

*Doug Graves*

On Saturday, August 25th at 6:30 p.m., the Graves Mill Community will host a Civil War Memorial Ceremony, directly adjacent to Graves Chapel. One of their planned projects, as part of the Jamestown 2007 Community Program, is to establish a Civil War Memorial. Forty men from the Graves Mill area have been identified as having participated in the defense of Virginia, just prior to and during the Civil War. Their names are memorialized on a bronze plaque mounted on native stones.

A full dress ceremony will be conducted by the Madison Chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, the Kemper-Strother-Frye Camp #19, under the leadership of Commander William J. Graham, III. The ceremony will include a 21-gun salute provided by a Rifle Squad. Wreaths are welcomed. Rain or Shine. Light refreshments will be provided.

## Spring Cleaning

*Lynne Lewis*

Once again this year, the Locust Grove chapter of the AARP provided volunteers to help clean up the front of 130 Caroline Street. On May 10, Shirley and Bob Pfile, and Bill and Rosemary Walker came armed with rakes, an edger, weed-pullers and plenty of enthusiasm to make short work of the excess ivy, dandelions and assorted other unwanted items in the flower beds and along the hedge row.

In addition, the two front planters were planted in this year's color scheme (red, white and blue in honor of Virginia's 400th anniversary) with white, and red and white petunias, and blue salvia. Faithful watering by office administrator Jean McGann has kept the planters growing and blossoming.

It has been noted that while the existing plantings around the research center are lovely, and the azaleas are spectacular in the spring, once they finish there is very little color for the rest of the year. In an effort to alleviate that situation, daylilies, hostas and dusty miller have been planted around the area, with more daylilies to come. The hostas and one of the daylilies came courtesy of Shirley Pfile, who returned to plant them. Eight "Mary Todd" lilies and one "Happy Returns" were also planted, the eight a gift from your President's step-father, Stanley A. Betzold, who raises daylilies in Mecklenberg County.

Finally, a very important improvement has been made to the interior of the building, courtesy of new member Tony Rizzo. Two brand new, sparkling clean coffee urns were donated by Tony, for which we are all extremely grateful.



AARP Cleanup Crew, left to right: Bob Pfile, Shirley Pfile, Bill Walker, Rosemary Walker

Lynne Lewis

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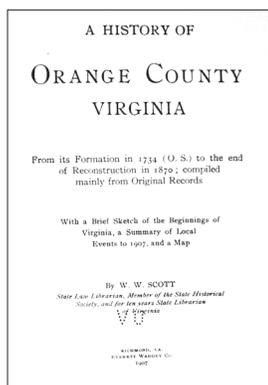
## Announcements

Ellwood – August 27, 2007. On August 27 we will be going to Ellwood, the National Park Service site near the intersection of Routes 20 and 3 in Locust Grove. Ellwood was constructed in the 1790s by William Jones, and Lafayette dined there in 1824. The property passed into the Lacy family with the marriage of Betty Churchill Jones and J. Horace Lacy.

It was during the Civil War that Ellwood acquired its fame, most notably serving as the burial place of Stonewall Jackson's arm. We are delighted to announce that Carolyn Elstner, a descendant of the Lacy family, will present a brief talk on Ellwood and her association with it.

Mark September 24, 2007 on Your Calendar  
in Big Red Letters!

We have a special program planned, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the publication of W. W. Scott's *A History of Orange County, Virginia*.



This was the first comprehensive history of Orange County (and the only one until Frank Walker's *Remembering*). Special guests are being invited and it should be a very entertaining evening. Additional information will be provided later.

## A Question for Our Members

When, at the behest of the publications committee, Ann Miller undertook the production of the second edition of *Antebellum Orange*, neither she nor they knew precisely the extent of work that would be required. So many homes have changed hands, many have been renovated and a few, sadly, have been lost in the almost 20 years since the first edition of *Antebellum Orange*. And while we fully intend to have an up-to-date version within the next year or so, we know that many of our members and visitors to Orange County miss having the book available.

Therefore, we would like to ask our membership how they feel about having an interim publication, basically the first edition with an errata sheet appended. If you would let us know either by phone call (540-672-5366) or email ([info@orangecovahist.org](mailto:info@orangecovahist.org)), we would be most appreciative. It would be helpful to know this so we can judge how many copies would be best to reprint. Thank you!

## Up on the Roof

Lynne Lewis

After many attempts to obtain bids on a new roof for the Historical Society's Research Center, two were finally received in July. The Board voted to accept one of the two bids, for a new 50-year asphalt shingle roof. This will be a complete re-roofing, and not merely the application of new shingles over the old. The color (Oyster Gray) has been selected, the shingles ordered, and work is expected to begin in late August/early September. Hooray! And, again, a big thanks to those who contributed to our annual fund drive – if it weren't for you this wouldn't be happening!