

Orange Oracle

An Occasional Electronic Update from the Orange County Historical Society

Newsbits

History-to-Go

If you can't come to an Historical Society program because of Covid-19, then we'll bring the presentation to you. With the help of Ray Ezell, Ross Hunter and Phil Audibert, the Historical Society now has a YouTube channel. On this channel, we will publish edited video recordings of Historical Society programs that were cancelled due to the lockdown. The first one is already up: *The Dedication Ceremony for the Madison-Barbour Rural Historic District*. Just follow this link: <https://youtu.be/c8GcVBf7Hps> Click on the Historical Society logo to bring up the History-to-Go channel. Then click "subscribe."

New Board Members Sought

The terms of three Historical Society Board members, (Lynne Lewis, Paul Carter and Freida Willey) expire at the end of this year. The unexpired term of Dick

The Chimneys

by Frank Walker



Two restored chimneys- Photo by Lyne Shackelford

Editor's Note- Frank Walker has published a paper about a piece of property that has been in his family since 1935. He's hoping someone will come forward with information regarding the stone chimneys for which the property is named.

Although there is plenty of evidence of Native American presence in the area, the first European owner of the land was Colonel James Taylor II. In 1722, he conveyed a large tract containing The Chimneys to John Taliaferro ("Toliver"). Eventually, the Chimneys portion came into the ownership of members of the Willis family. The future Chimneys tract came out of the American Civil War (1861-65) as the 263-acre "Mountain Field" of Wood Park, a farm owned by George Willis.

Durphy, who died earlier this year also remains to be filled. The OCHS Nominating Committee is actively seeking people willing to serve on the board for a three year term. Please send email to: ocvahistorical1965@gmail.com to volunteer or to recommend someone to fill these positions.

Gold Mine bottle found

During a dry spell this summer, a bottle was found at the bottom of a shaft at the former Dickey Gold Mine in eastern OC. According to the property owner, Beecher Sutherland, the bottle contained Ferrous Sulfate (FeSO₄). Ferrous Sulfate is one of the compounds that will precipitate gold out of a solution. If that is indeed the case, Mr. Sutherland has made quite an historic find.

Porter Paintings Sought

I am a great-granddaughter of John James Porter of Culpeper County, noted portrait and landscape artist of the middle to late nineteenth century. For many years I have been photographing all of his paintings that I could locate, first for my own pleasure and then later as a legacy for my two grandsons. Do you or any of your members know of any of his paintings in your locale? Rachel Porter Bitler, email: rbitler@ptd.net

The chimneys are located along and close to the Route 673 boundary of the property, where it slopes down to intersect with Route 700, just a few hundred yards west of Trimmer's Crossing on the Norfolk Southern Railroad. Their hearth openings reveal that the frame portions of the cabins lay between the chimneys and the road.



Photo by Lyne Shackelford

Theories involving the chimneys with slavery, with the Civil War, with Emancipation, and with railroading had all been advanced, but the dates and the circumstances didn't fit. Research showed that the chimneys went from "just-built" in the 1880s to abandoned and collapsing in barely 50 years.

Interestingly, it doesn't appear that the frame portions of the cabins burned or rotted down at the chimney sites. Ashes are only abundant at the bases of the chimneys, not out where the cabins stood. There are no partially burned or rotted framing timbers under the grass. Numerous cut and wire nails have been found, and many evidence they having been pulled out of the wood into which they had been driven. I suspect that the frame portions of the cabins were dismantled and the materials used elsewhere. If that is in fact the case, those materials may be in one or more structures still standing in the region today.

Frank Walker