

Newsletter

Orange County Historical Society

Spring 2009

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New Photo Album Comes to the Historical Society

Samuel T. Elswick

THE ORANGE COUNTY Historical Society has acquired, through private donation, a fantastic piece of local history. An album containing over 100 photographs, all of which date from the early 20th century (most from circa 1910-1930), is now available for researchers at the Orange County Historical Society Research Center. The photographs include images of the people and places that characterized rural life in Orange and Madison counties. If you have roots in this area of Virginia, your ancestors may appear in this album!

The donor, who prefers to remain anonymous, gave the album to the Society for several reasons. First, the Society has the expertise and the facilities to properly store and care for this delicate treasure. Too often, old photographs and documents are lost to the ravages of time, and this album contains far too much information and nostalgia to let that happen. Second, genealogists and others interested in local history will likely find their own gems within this album, and donating it to the society opens its 100-year-old pages to anyone who cares to see them. The album has been scanned as part of the Society's ongoing digitization project in order to protect the originals.

Many of the photographs have labels or captions to identify places or individuals. Families represented include Utz, Sparks, Hall, Walker, and many others. The subject matter varies from formal portraits to whimsical farm scenes, from local landscapes to



Mrs. Robert Walker (Anne Carter Goss Walker). Board member Frank S. Walker, Jr. was very surprised to see this picture of his grandmother in the photo album recently donated to the Society.

historic buildings. Even some rather large hogs make an appearance. Syria, Barbourville, Locust Grove, and the scenic Rapidan River all make an appearance in the album.

Although many of the people and places are readily identified, there are still quite a few that remain a mystery. This is a fantastic reason for our members to visit the research center and lend their knowledge and expertise to revealing the secrets of this local history treasure. In fact, local historian Frank Walker was surprised to find buried within this album a previously unknown photograph of his grandmother—you may find your ancestors as well!

Our sincerest thanks go to the donor of this wonderful addition to our collection.

Kudos

Huge bunches of kudos go out to several people without whom the interior renovations of 130 Caroline Street would not have been accomplished so expeditiously. Paul Carter and Everette Tucker, board members and our Buildings and Grounds Committee spearheaded the efforts and did the lion's share of the work needed to allow the painting contractor to begin his work. Everette and Paul were aided by Carla Wascalus (board member), Ann Miller (research historian) and several

others who also pitched in to help with this project. Although we had to close for a week while the front room was being painted, the project moved forward with minimal disruption to our activities. Special thanks go out to Sedwick's Building Supply, who donated all the wall paint and to the Orange Paint Shop for their contribution of a portion of the trim paint.

So – Thank you to everyone who helped, but most of all, thanks to Paul and Everette for efforts above and beyond!

Picnics & Programs

Lynne Lewis

Graves Mill

We began our 2008 picnic season on June 30th with a trip to the village of Graves Mill, near Wolfstown, in Madison County. And what a picnic it was! We had a bit of everything from bright sunshine to a thunderstorm resulting in a glorious rainbow to a beautiful sunset for the ending. Although farther afield than our normal venue, almost 80 people made the trip and all were glad they came.

The picnic was preceded, on June 2nd, by a presentation at the Research Center from Orange County Historical Society member Doug Graves. He gave an illustrated history of the Graves Mill settlement and the grist mill in much greater detail than could have been provided at the picnic site. The mill is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

At the picnic, Dreama Travis, owner of the mill and the Old Mill House Bed & Breakfast, and Doug Graves hosted the Society members, and Graves Chapel provided shelter from the thunderstorm. There we learned more about the settlement and heard the story of how some members of the Orange County Historical Society helped to salvage the Chapel after the historic flood of June 1995. Once the storm abated, we were invited to walk over to the mill. As twilight gathered the picnickers lingered to enjoy the beauty of the Blue Ridge and thank our hosts for such a delightful evening.

Aerie

The lovely home and gardens of Mr. and Mrs. William Remington were the setting for our July picnic. Located west of the Town of Gordonsville on Highway 33, Aerie was built just prior to the Civil War on a tract of land known as "Egypt." The historic house and land of Aerie Farm have been known by a number of different names over its century and a half history. Bill Remington provided a brief review of the renovations that had been made, which carefully preserve the historic character of the property.

Members were then kindly invited to stroll in the gardens and visit the interior of the house and guest house. The evening was lovely, and our hosts were most gracious.

Gordonsville's Main Street Churches

The August 25th meeting of the Orange County Historical Society was a "bring your own picnic" get-together at the Gordonsville United Methodist Church picnic shelter. Church and local historians discussed the history of the church buildings and congregations of the four extant historic Main Street churches: United Methodist, Presbyterian, Christian, and the old St. Mark's Catholic Church. Members learned of the plans

See Programs on page 3.



Bryan Wright

Mill (above) and old school house (below) at Graves Mill in Madison County.



Lynne Lewis



Lynne Lewis

Hosts Mr. and Mrs. Remington talking to a picnicker at Aerie.

Programs (*continued*)

to convert the oldest portion of St. Mark's into part of the new Gordonsville Library, and were treated to a history of the United Methodist Church by a member of the congregation and the pastor. A few intrepid members climbed the stairs at the front of the church to view the upper floor, part of which once served as a Masonic hall.



Lynne Lewis

John Floyd in front of the Christian Church, leading the tour of Gordonsville's Main Street Churches.

Across the street members had a sidewalk tour of the Christian Church and viewed the interior of the Presbyterian Church. The evening was quite successful and informative, and everyone was grateful to the churches for providing such a pleasant venue.

Manual Level

What do the early 19th century, the 1950s and the 21st century all have in common? Well, marvelous examples of each can be seen all in one place – Manual Level. The home of John and Dee Cannon, this was the site of our first-ever successful September picnic (the initial try, in 2006, was rained out and postponed to the following summer). A massive structure, Manual Level stands upon a 22-inch-thick stone-walled English basement. Twentieth and twenty-first century changes and renovations have built upon the original, ca. 1815, house but have retained much of its original plan and character.

Thanks to our hosts we had the wonderful opportunity to see this recently restored historic home. John not only discussed the work that was done, but provided a marvelous slide show of before and after photographs. All the structures exhibited serious deterioration, and the Cannons moved quickly to rescue this wonderful home. Oh, and the 1950s? Well, if one walked to one end of the home, the outside of a genuine 1950s bomb shelter was quite visible!

Although it got dark much too quickly for all the people who wanted to spend more time, everyone was most grateful

to the Cannons for making their beautiful home available to Society members.

A Revealing Look at 19th-Century Ladies' Fashion

Seldom has the author attended a historical society program that provoked more merriment and more questions. And never has the author been greeted with the sight of two ladies in their undergarments at the start of a program. Thus began local re-enactor and noted horsewoman Heidi McMurrans' October presentation.

Billed as a "reverse strip tease," Ms. McMurrans, with able assistance and modeling by Board member Carla Wascalus, turned the auditorium of the Research Center into a lady's boudoir as she dressed Carla as a yeoman farmer's wife and herself as a lady of quality. She offered an informative look at everything a mid-19th-century woman would wear, often to the amazement of the audience at the number and weight of the garments considered necessary for proper attire. Ms. McMurrans also displayed some items of men's wear.

It was a most pleasant evening and people remained talking with Heidi long after the formal presentation was completed.

Recollections of Raccoon Ford

Tucked away on a bend in the Rapidan River, Raccoon Ford was once a bustling river community on the then-main road to Richmond. While many communities like Raccoon Ford are fading from the collective memory, reminiscences of this one have been recorded by local video producer Donnie Johnston. Members viewed highlights of Mr. Johnston's video and then heard reminiscences from men and women who remember the community as it was.

Celebrate Orange/Music on Main Street

For the third consecutive year, the Historical Society participated in the New Year's Eve festivities in Orange. Frank Walker presented two talks – one on the general history of Orange County and the other on gold mining in the Wilderness (where a new Wal-Mart may be constructed). As always, Frank's talks were well attended and well received, and the warm beverages were appreciated by those who stopped in to see us.

Annual Membership Meeting

On Sunday, January 25, our Annual Membership Meeting celebrated 30 years in the 130 Caroline Street building with a bit of the history of our Historical Society. Atwell Somerville and others, including Judson "Bugs" Gardner, who provided architectural services, described the planning and challenges of transforming the former gas station and school bus garage into our research center.

2008 Annual Fund Donors

Early in the New Year, the Society's Annual Fund Drive committee closed its books on the 2008 drive and announced that a total of \$9310 was received. Your Board is deeply grateful to the members and friends of the Society named below for their continuing support of its programs, publications, and heritage-based services to members and to the public generally. The 2008 drive sought funds to assist with operations and maintenance, and we trust that you will see continued progress in these areas as 2009 progresses.

Thank you so very much.
Carol Couch & Joyce Clark

Lorie Adams in memory of Vera Adams
Mrs. John C. Barrow
in memory of Mrs. Eugene S. Ince, Jr. "Jean"
Joan Bergstrom
Jayne E. Blair
Paul R. Brockman
in memory of Billy Brockman (Wm. A. Brockman, Jr.)
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in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Burrus
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Bill Jones

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Mr. and Mrs. J. Nelson Tucker
William H. Tyler in memory of Andrew R. Tyler, father

See **Donors** on page 5.

Donors (*continued*)

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Paul Jennings: Enamoured with Freedom

Beth Taylor, Director of Education at James Madison's Montpelier, will present a lecture entitled "Paul Jennings: Enamoured with Freedom" on Monday, April 27, 2009, at the Historical Society Research Center. The lecture will present newly discovered historical facts and images about this fascinating man and a newly developed genealogy tracing the family's descent from Jennings.

Paul Jennings was James Madison's enslaved manservant. He attended Madison before his presidency, during his years at the White House, and at his death at Montpelier. Jennings began his life as a slave and ended it as a free man, employed by the U.S. government, and living in a thriving, primarily black community in the nation's capital city.

While serving Madison in the White House, Jennings played an important role in the rescue of George Washington's portrait during the War of 1812. After James Madison's death, Jennings accompanied Dolley to Washington, DC, and was subsequently sold to Senator Daniel Webster. He later bought his freedom, became an abolitionist, gave the aged and impoverished Dolley Madison money from his own pocket, saw his sons fight with the Union Army in the Civil War, and died a man of property in northwest Washington at age 75. Paul Jennings also left an early, personal account of his life in the White House in "A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison," published in 1865.

Bringing the story full circle, one of his current descendants attended James Madison University, works for the U.S. government, and still lives in the same house in Georgetown where Jennings' granddaughter and only namesake, Pauline, lived. He is the fourth generation to live in that house.

The life of Paul Jennings shows us a remarkable piece of American history. We hope you will join us for this excellent talk.



Pauline Jennings Marshall, by V. H. Ricks, courtesy of the family.

The Famous Frank Walker Winter Seminar Series aka FFWSS!

For the fourth year in a row, Frank Walker, author of *Remembering* and noted local historian, has brightened our winter by presenting his Winter Seminar Series on the history of Orange County. The seminars were hosted this year by Locust Grove Chapter 5239 of the American Association of Retired People (AARP) and were held in the clubhouse at Lake of the Woods.

As always, the series was very successful, with an average attendance of 70 at each of the five talks. Covering the range of Orange County history from its earliest days through Reconstruction, everyone who attended enjoyed learning (or learning more) about their home county. Sincere thanks go out to Joe Wascalus and other members of the Locust Grove AARP who were there every time to set up chairs, make coffee and generally ensure that things ran smoothly. Thanks too, to Historical Society members who staffed the sales table and helped clean up afterwards.

Orange County Historical Society
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Zachary Taylor Away On Assignment

Frank Walker

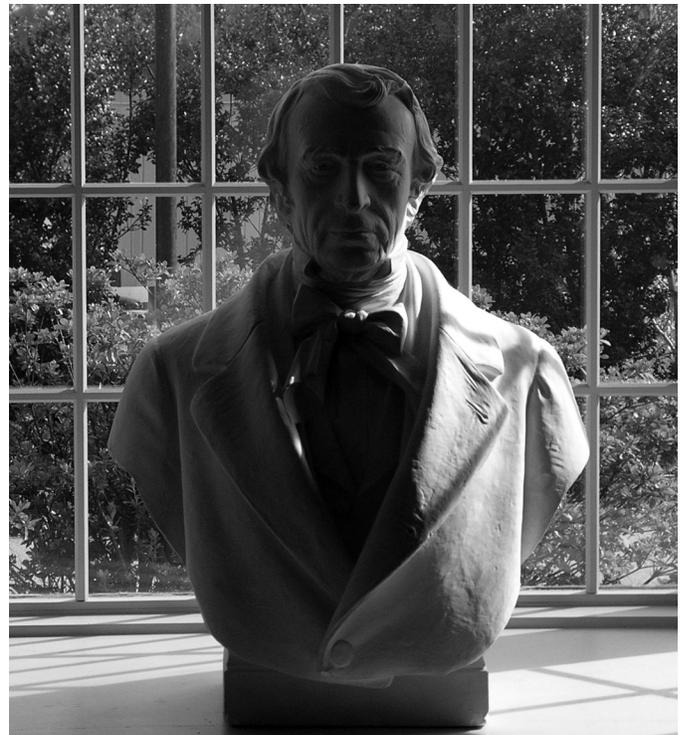
All first-time visitors to the Society's Research Center quickly sense the room-filling presence of the bust of former General and U. S. President Zachary Taylor. From his perch on the bay window ledge overseeing the research work area, "Old Rough and Ready" inspects and monitors everyone and everything in the room. Taylor was given to Orange County when the Jamestown Festival Park's bicentennial celebration exhibit was taken down in 1991. The county Supervisors asked us to give him a home, and we've been honored with his presence ever since.

Well, he's gone—albeit not permanently.

Late in November, the bust was carried across the street to the James Madison Museum to join a similar bust of James Madison on loan from Montpelier, and on November 30, the Museum's exhibit entitled, "Presidential Cousins" was opened with a birthday bash for Zachary thrown by his cousin Helen Marie Taylor. A large, happy, noisy crowd was treated to food, drink, music, and short speeches. Zachary's features even appeared to soften a bit, while Cousin James seemed to be controlling his usual discomfort over being in large crowds. Excluding James, a grand time was had by all.

A brief note on the Taylor bust: It is a plaster copy of the original created by F. William Sievers and on exhibit in the State Capitol. Local sculptor Thomas Marsh, who appraised the bust for us before its loan to the Museum, says it is an especially fine copy created by sculptor Herman Haug. Mr. Haug's copy of Siever's bust of Madison was deemed worthy of itself being copied by Montpelier, so in addition to a reunion of cousins and presidents, the Museum's exhibit is also something of an artistic reunion.

Zachary Taylor will be back in March 2010, but for right now, we miss him.



Lynne Lewis

Did You Forget. . .

To renew your membership? Did you know that membership dues make up almost 20% of our annual income (another 20% coming from the kindness of our annual fund drive donors)? You can see why your membership is so important to us, and if you haven't yet had the chance to renew, please do take a moment to do so. Thank you!