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Historical Society Annual Report

As president of the Historical Society, it's my pleasure to provide the annual report to the membership as required by our Bylaws.

The past twelve months have been unprecedented. The COVID-19 crisis has changed the way we live, work, shop, travel, play and worship. It has had a profound impact on organizations like ours that depend on tourism and travel. Three-fourths of the people who have visited our library in the past have been from outside Washington County. This year we postponed opening of our library until June. Even then, visits are down significantly from previous years. Our revenue from sales and services has dropped substantially; only our on-line sales are close to what we budgeted.

More people, spending more time at home, have turned to the Internet for research; our website visits are up 18% from last year. Over 5,000 people are in our Facebook page, up a third in the past year, and they maintain a lively daily discussion about Washington County history.

The Society has three part-time employees, so we were able to secure PPP funding from the CARES Act to help with their salaries. We also will receive a \$10,000 Virginia Humanities grant to continue scanning and indexing images, which will require matching funds or volunteer time. Both our rental units are leased, and our reserve funds survived the stock market drop without a net loss.

We held a retreat after the last annual meeting to identify our strengths and weakness and discuss goals. One goal the Board adopted is to increase the number of dues-paid members by at least 40 by the end of 2020, bucking a trend in most historical societies. We're well on our way to achieving that goal. If we keep it up for four more years, we will have increased our membership revenue by 50% without raising dues.

We staged a great "Spirits" event at the Cummings cabin in Sinking Spring cemetery last fall, but our Sinking Spring cemetery tour was canceled this summer along with the Virginia Highlands Festival. Only time will tell whether we can stage another event this coming October.



Annual Meeting Notice

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Board of Directors has voted to cancel our in-person annual meeting and conduct our business by mail.

The Board has referred two bylaws amendments to the membership for consideration. Two Board positions are also up for election, and the membership needs to affirm officers for the balance of their terms.

Enclosed in this newsletter you'll find a ballot. All dues-paid members of the Society are entitled to vote on the Society's business. Our bylaws require at least 25 people to participate to constitute a quorum, so we encourage you to vote and send in your completed ballot.

We regret that we were unable to hold an in-person annual meeting, but our concern is for the health of all of our members. We hope you'll help by completing your ballot and sending it in promptly. Thank you!

Our second "Conversation" featuring Thomas Jefferson interpreter Bill Barker and Col. Patrick Henry (portrayed by Richard Schumann from Colonial Williamsburg) drew over 300 guests at the Barter Theatre, and we hope to have a third event in February 2021. Over 900 local students were also able to hear from them as they toured local schools.

Within the next year we hope to install a slice of the massive Hassinger oak tree in Abingdon, showing a time line of historic events. The exhibit promises to be a tourism attraction for generations to come.

The Historical Society will adjust again with changing circumstances as best we can, keeping our focus on preserving and sharing the rich history of our county. The times are challenging, but with your support and our team of staff, volunteers and Board members, we will be successful.

- Walter Jenny, President

Once in a Lifetime

If we're lucky, at least once in our ordinary lives we get a chance to be part of something extraordinary - an event, a war battle, meeting a famous person - a story worth sharing with your kids or grandkids. For a group of boys at a small high school in Washington County, their moment was an unbeaten season, winning the state basketball championship, and being inspired by a remarkable coach and teacher.

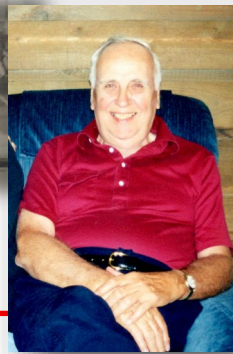
Howard Sullins was born in Hemp Hill, West Virginia in 1927, the second of eight children of Howard D Sullins, a coalminer, and his wife Ida (James) Sullins. After the family moved to Washington County, he graduated from Greendale High School in 1944 at age 16, and enrolled at Emory & Henry College in 1945. He served a year in the Army in Japan in the military police, then returned to finish his bachelor's degree in history at E&H. He received his master's degree in education at Columbia University.

From 1949 to 1953 he taught American history, government, English and biology at Bethel High School while his wife, Mabel (Henderson) Sullins, taught at Meadowview. While he was there, he coached the boys' basketball teams, and his 1952 squad went undefeated and won the state championship.

Howard became the principal at Eagle Rock, then served as principal at James Monroe High School in Fredericksburg from 1954 to 1965, where the local Jaycees named him "Man of the Year" in 1956. He was elected treasurer of the Virginia Education Association in 1963. He was superintendent of several school systems in Northern Virginia the rest of his career, taking time out to obtain his Ph.D. in education from the University of Virginia. While in Charlottesville, he worked for HEW, and traveled throughout the Deep South to help with the integration of the public schools. He retired in 1987 after a thirteen year stint as superintendent of the Chesterfield County schools.

Howard Sullins died Feb. 21, 2019 at age 91. He and his wife are buried at Abingdon's Knollkreg Cemetery.

During his remarkable career, Dr. Sullins impacted the lives of thousands of young people. But one of his earliest achievements was the once in a lifetime chance to nurture a small high school basketball team from Southwest Virginia into unbeaten state champions. It proved to the team and their classmates - and himself - that anything was possible. That lesson can now be shared through the Historical Society with future generations of Washington County residents.



Bethel School has its roots in the "Old Union" school which stood from 1850 to 1868 in an area between Abingdon and Damascus named for the Seminole chief Osceola.

Bethel Church was built by area residents about 1870, and in 1880 they erected a one room log school house on land donated by Benjamin D. Reed. By 1885 there were 85 pupils taught by Mrs. E. V. Campbell; high school classes were added in 1905.

After Abingdon High was built in 1959, Bethel became an elementary school, which closed in 1981.

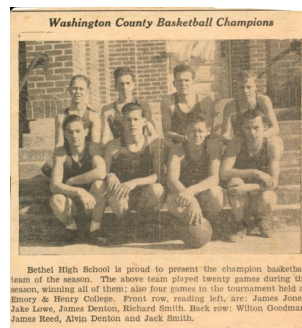
The 1952 Division III state championship basketball team was coached by Howard Sullins. They beat McKenney High of Dinwiddie County 44-39 at the VMI fieldhouse after leading the entire game. No other team scored more than 36 points against Bethel that year, and Bethel won 24 straight games.

Fifty years later, some of the team members were reunited with Coach Sullins, and autographed basketballs for each other. Pictured below are Bruce Millsap, Dexter "Bud" Widener, Monte Stamper, Jack Selfe and Ernie "Cotton" Hensdill.

Lee Sullins and his sister have donated his father's prized basketball to the Historical Society, along with photos from his father which will be added to our collection. Thank you!



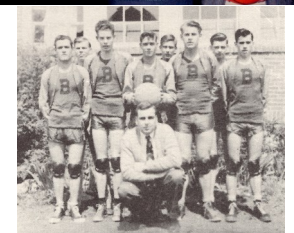
From the 1949 Bethel High yearbook



Bethel High School is proud to present the champion basketball team of the season. The above team played twenty games during the season, winning all of them; also four games in the tournament held at Emory & Henry College. Front row, reading left, are: James Jones, Jake Lowe, James Denton, Richard Smith. Back row: Wilton Goodman, James Reed, Alvin Denton and Jack Smith.



Another Bethel team: James Minnick, A.J. VanHuss, Wilmer Price, Harry Minton and Bill Buckles



Coach Sullins with his 1949 team

"Our vision is to be an educational resource and community leader committed to collecting, preserving and sharing the records of people, places and events, so that future generations may find common interest and knowledge in the unique heritage of our County and surrounding region."

HS Tackles African American Project

2020 marks the 150th anniversary of the 1870 census, the first in which African Americans are listed by name - and for many, a dead end in their genealogical research.

The Historical Society has embarked on a year-long effort to identify as many of the black residents of our county at the time of emancipation as possible, and locate as many of their living descendants as possible. They'll be invited to come to Washington County next summer.

In 1870, 2,876 blacks were recorded in Washington County - about 17% of the population of 16,816. Today, the African American population is estimated to be about 806, about 1.5% of our total population of 53,740. Only six Virginia counties have a lower percentage. The county's total population is down 1,136 since 2010.

The "WashCoVA Family Tree" has been created on Ancestry.com, where the blacks recorded in the 1870 census have been posted. Other information, such as the 1866 cohabitation list and lists of free blacks, are being added. Ancestry's algorithms and hints will help identify living descendants, who will be asked to participate.

Many blacks left Southern states after emancipation in search of jobs and better opportunities. Many black families were broken up during slavery, never to be reunited. Now their descendants may be able to meet distant cousins who share similar family stories, and learn where their ancestors lived and labored in Washington County.

Assisting in the project is Kenyatta Berry, host of the PBS program "Genealogy Roadshow." Now living in California, she grew up in Detroit in a family with roots in Virginia, although not Washington County. A published author and expert on African American genealogy, she understands the issues involved in this line of research.

Also involved will be Emory & Henry's Appalachian Center for Civic Life. During the 1970s, a large number of oral histories were recorded that will provide a treasure trove of information for researchers.

Attendees will be invited to schedule their 2021 family reunions in the county, learn about life in Washington County, and share their families' oral histories and photographs. The event may include genealogy workshops as well as academic research into African American history.

The project will require the support of local volunteers and the community, but will provide rich insights into life in Washington County before the Civil War. If you would like to help, contact the office of Society President Walter Jenny at wjenny314@comcast.net.

Page one of the 16-page slave schedule for Washington County in 1860 listed five slave owners with 78 black and mulatto slaves. None are identified by name or relationships, if any. Their ages range from 95 years to six months.

Meet A Volunteer

One of our loyal volunteers since 2006 is Jane Bryan, who also serves on the Library Committee.

Jane's interest in her own genealogy brought her to the Historical Society, but she also learned a lot about the history of Washington County, where she was born and raised. She gladly shares her knowledge with others.



Jane worked as a lab tech at Johnston Memorial Hospital for 47 years, and retired rather than be a part of the hospital's move to its new location.

She also enjoys traveling, and has been to every state except Hawaii, usually with bus tours. Now that travel is limited, she has shared her talents keeping the flower beds at the Historical Society beautiful. "Every plant here has been donated by a friend, many of whom are now gone," she said.

This spring she also tended to a duck she named Irene that nested behind a bush next to the library's front door. She fed and watered the duck, and as she left for the evening she always called out, "Good night Irene!"

Thank you, Jane, for your many hours of volunteer service with a smile! If you would like to volunteer, please contact us at volunteer@hswcv.org.



HS Hosts Blood Drive

It's nice to have a parking problem from time to time.

On July 25, the Historical Society hosted a blood drive for Marsh Blood Center. The event was sponsored by the Abingdon Rotary Club.

41 donors registered during the six hours, and 33 were able to donate. Marsh reports that as many as 123 lives will be saved as the result of this blood drive. Marsh supplies 25 hospitals and 12 cancer centers through Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia with lifesaving blood.

The high visibility of our new location was a perfect spot for Marsh's mobile unit, which can handle up to four donors at a time. We hope to make this an ongoing tradition as a community service.

Events like this also bring people through our doors who have never been here before. It's our hope that they'll come back to visit our library and exhibits, and consider joining and supporting the Society. It's a good way to build community relations. Thanks to all who participated!



Visit us on Facebook!

Historical Society of
Washington County, VA

Annual Meeting

This year's Annual Meeting will not be held in person, but we still have some business to consider.

The Board is referring two bylaws amendments to you for consideration. The first simply adds the museum function to the bylaws, so they will conform to the Articles of Incorporation to which the museum language was added last year. These amendments save the Society several thousand dollars a year in property taxes.

The second amendment adjusts the procedure for adding committee members. It allows committee chairs to appoint their committee members as needed. The existing language called for the Board to designate who served on committees.

We also have elections. Last year we failed to elect several of our officers when their terms came due, and the Board reappointed the incumbent Board members until this year's meeting. This election of officers will carry us through our 2021 meeting, which now is only a few months away. Two other Board positions are up for renewal for three year terms, and are on the ballot enclosed with this newsletter.

Remember to vote on both sides of the ballot!

We want to thank Mr. Gene Sturgeon for his service as Vice President. He resigned this spring. We haven't found anyone yet to fill his shoes - that will indeed be difficult - but the Board will try to do that in the coming months. We also want to thank all our Board members for their service.

At least 25 members are required to conduct a meeting, so please complete the enclosed ballot and get it to us before Sept. 14. You can mail them in or drop them by our office in Abingdon. We hope to see you in person at our next Annual Meeting in 2021.

Thank you to our Business Partners and Sponsors!



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Donations May 10, 2020–July 31, 2020

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1907 Postcard of Martha Washington College	Kitty Henninger, Newnan, GA
<i>Watts Bar Reservoir Cemeteries</i>	Martha Keys, Abingdon, VA
Wood from Fort Shelby log	Charlie Barnette
Map of Raleigh's Virginia	
<i>A Pictorial History of Bristol, TN/VA</i>	
<i>The Passing Years...History in Pictures – Bristol, VA/TN 1700s to 1950s</i>	
<i>Honoring Our Heritage – Faces and Places from the Past</i>	
<i>Washington Co., VA Will Book 6 (revised edition) 1827-1834</i>	Jack Hockett, Dover, DE
<i>Washington Co., VA Chancery Order Book, Circuit Court, Vol. C. 1859-1870</i>	
<i>Washington Co., VA Chancery Order Book, Circuit Court, Vol. D. 1870-1874</i>	
<i>Washington Co., VA Will Book 8 (revised edition), 1838-1841</i>	
Several years of <i>The Plow</i>	Ben Jennings, Abingdon, VA
<i>Publications of the Historical Society of Washington County, Virginia Series I</i>	The Family of Margaret Hughes
Letter regarding Aston Cemetery with partial list of burials	Barbara Pendry, N. Wilkesboro, NC
2 Payroll Stubs from Lincoln Industries, Inc. Damascus, VA	Judy Slagle Quesenberry, Abingdon, VA
Cherry Wardrobe built ca 1920	Gina Thayer Coleman, Jonesborough, TN
<i>Magazine of Virginia Genealogy, 2018-2019</i>	Nancy Bullock, Henrico, VA
2 Photographs of Martha Washington Inn prior to 1900	
Copy of 1814 Ledger from Sullivan County, TN	Judy Cole, Bristol, VA

Monetary Donations

May 10, 2020–July 31, 2020

In Memory of A. B. Neese by Doris N. Wells	Meadowview, VA			
Ronald R. Cassel	Los Gatos, CA		Barbara Smiley	Manakin Sabot, VA
Kitty M. Henninger	Newnan, GA		Victoria Baker	New Castle, DE
Mary Ann Hinshelwood	Abingdon, VA		Laura L. Livingston	Edgewood, WA
Tony and Janiece Hughes	Abingdon, VA		Anne M. Robilio	Memphis, TN
James and Katie Fleenor	Richmond, KY		Lori Grubb	Bristol, VA
James and Sara Davidson	Lebanon, OH		Danny and Tammy Carter	Bristol, VA
Charles and Elizabeth Seaver	Abingdon, VA		Audrey A. Honegger	Des Moines, WA
Sandra D. Kruse	Friendswood, TX		Clinch Mountain Press	Emory, VA
Mark Hagy	Abingdon, VA		Michael K. Smeltzer	Roanoke, VA
Mr. & Mrs. Wallace Davenport	Houston, TX		Stephen and Lisa Jett	Abingdon, VA
Fielden and Susan Sanders	Wytheville, VA		Randall and Mary Sue Smith	Abingdon, VA
Shelley Hart	Moses Lake, WA		Deborah Icenhour	Abingdon, VA
John A. Miller	Arlington, TX		Patricia Hatfield	Abingdon, VA
John and Annette Legard	Abingdon, VA		Barbara Farris and Family	Abingdon, VA
Mary Jane Cox	Richmond, VA		Carl Bergstrom	Ashland, MA
Hazel Blackwell	Edison, NJ		Joella Johnson Barbour	Glade Spring, VA
Mary Kegley	Wytheville, VA		Dr. and Mrs. J. H. Bowden, Jr.	Abingdon, VA
Arthur E. Wills	Raleigh, NC		William Roark	Abingdon, VA
Thomas C. Phillips, Jr.	Abingdon, VA		Suzanne E. Whallen	Mountville, PA
Greg and Nancy Thomas	Cleveland, TN		Diana Eve Rosen	Flowery Branch, GA
Jean Dilworth	Waxhaw, NC		Betty Ramming	Hinton, OK
Robin Luhmann	Big Island, VA		Mary Ann Ehlschlager	Minneapolis, MN
Pamela Jamarik & Charles Wallace	Abingdon, VA		Augusta Waters	Gadsden, AL



The Historical Society
of Washington County, Virginia, Inc.
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Among the photos donated by the Sullins family are these classics. Unfortunately, no names or dates are written on the back. They are undoubtedly from the 1949-1953 years when Howard Sullins taught and coached at Bethel High School.

Do you recognize anyone? If you do, please let us know at photos@hswcv.org so we can properly index them in our Oakes collection. We have over 185,000 indexed images, and it's best if we can connect names to pictures so future researchers can find an ancestor or loved one. You can always search our database at hswcv.org. Thank you!



Historical Society of Washington County, Virginia

276-623-8337
office@hswcv.org



Tues. - Fri. 10 am - 4 pm
Sat. 11 am - 4 pm



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