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Historical Society Faces Challenges

Virtually every aspect of our society has been affected by the COVID-19 virus, and historical societies like ours are no different.

Our library did not open in March as it usually does. We've been available by appointment to researchers, but few have taken us up on that offer. We hope to open in June, but we will be following safety guidelines in order to protect the health of our guests and volunteers.

Our staff is working with reduced hours and social distancing. We have rescheduled our annual meeting, and postponed a planned exhibit. The town and county, which provide us a small amount of support, face their own financial problems. The annual Virginia Highlands Festival has been canceled, so we won't have our Sinking Spring cemetery tour this summer. We miss seeing our friends!

We now have two tenants in our building - The Travel Shoppe and A Touch of Color, a new art supply store. We also have assigned our remaining lease of the train depot to Adventure Abingdon, a bicycle rental and repair business. Unfortunately, all three of these businesses are hit hard by the travel and business restrictions, so we have not realized the additional revenue from them that we had expected. As the economy improves, we hope they do well.

We've had other changes not directly connected to the pandemic. Longtime volunteer Jane Oakes has retired, and her absence in the building is significant. Board member and vice president Gene Sturgeon is also stepping down. Their contributions have been invaluable.

On a bright note, our Facebook group has grown to over 4,400 people because more folks are spending time at home. The number of posts and comments have soared; "reactions" alone are up over 300% in the last sixty days. People are satisfying their hunger for history online more than ever before, and we need to be engaged in that.

We have our annual membership drive each spring, and this year is no different. Our



Annual Meeting Rescheduled

The 2020 Annual Meeting of the Historical Society has been tentatively rescheduled for **Saturday, Sept. 26** at the Higher Ed Center in Abingdon due to the coronavirus restrictions. Tickets for the event will be \$35 per person, the same as last year. Dress will be casual, or you may choose to dress in 1910's or suffragette attire as we mark the centennial of women's right to vote in the United States. Now you have plenty of time to plan for the right outfit!

If you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors, please contact Martha Keys, chair of the nominating committee.

Be sure to pay your annual dues, and invite a friend or relative to join. We look forward to seeing you at the 2020 Annual Meeting!

dues-paid membership is up significantly, and we're well on our way to meeting our goal of increasing our membership from 400 to 440 by the end of 2020. If we can continue that for the next four years, we'll meet our long-term goal of 600 members - a 50% increase, and a big boost to our visibility and our bottom line.

We can only do that, of course, if we keep the support of you and others who are already members. You will receive a separate request for renewal from our office. Please renew your membership - and consider a gift membership for a friend or relative, or invite someone else to join. Student memberships are only \$10!

Like our ancestors, we've faced challenges before, and we plan on sticking around for another generation. Thank you for standing with us. We'll see you again soon.



Fuller Bus Line

The Saltville parking lot, 1966.

In 1966 the parking lot was all parking lot...no trees, no grass, no buildings...just 100 marked off spaces to park. It's configuration was oval with most of the parking inside the oval.

Since the 1800s, this space has been the focal point of downtown Saltville.

It was known as the cruising capital of Southwest Virginia in the '50s and '60s. The "perfect storm" of automobile production in Detroit in 1955 saw the birth of style and performance in cars that created the golden age of automobiles in America.

The parking lot was THE hangout spot for all ages, but especially for teenagers and young adults with wheels.

The bus? For several decades, the Fuller Bus Lines of Bristol had a regular run to Saltville from Bristol and all points in between. It made two runs a day to and from Bristol.

In the 1940s, many folks didn't have an automobile. Since the town had many cab stands, taxi service was only a phone call away.

If you wanted to go to Abingdon or Bristol, there was always the Fuller Bus. It's terminal in Saltville was a long parking spot in front of the Mathieson General Store's west end Mathieson Drug. It's terminus in Bristol was at the rear of the J. C. Penney store on the corner of Piedmont Avenue and State Street.

From Saltville, heading to Bristol, the bus made regular stops at Plasterco, Glade Spring, Meadowview, Abingdon and anywhere someone was standing alongside Hwy 11 and flagged it down.

The bus would usually have a driver from Saltville who would park his bus at night either at the west end of the company store or on the parking lot.

Fuller drivers wore blue uniforms and caps and were very professional. The bus pictured here was probably driven by Charles "Flop" Swartz, who lived on West Main in Saltville.

This story was written by Don Smith.

The Fuller Bus Line belonged to Guy Allan Fuller (1903-2001), who was born four miles east of Mendota to John Wesley and Eliza Jane (Gobble) Fuller.

In 1924 he secured a mail route by motorcycle in Bristol; he then bought a car, and began to supplement his income by carrying passengers. He eventually dropped the mail route and bought a struggling one-bus franchise from Harlan Patrick. He acquired more vehicles, and arranged the schedules so working people could travel into Bristol, then have a ride home at the end of the day. Eventually the profitable service connected Bristol, Abingdon, Meadowview, Glade Spring and Saltville, and included a charter service.

Thank you, Don! If you have an interesting story to tell, contact us! We may use it in a future newsletter.

I can remember a couple of Bristol based drivers who had kin connections in Saltville...J. D. and Sidney Farris.

It was a familiar sight in town for onlookers to check out who was getting off the bus after it parked in front of the Mathieson Drug.



An early custom-made Fuller bus

Down through the years, several teachers at Saltville High who lived in Abingdon or Bristol rode the bus to and from the high school where the bus would stop when the school was on West Main.

Sometime in the '70s, the bus service stopped. Most people had a vehicle or two by then and riding a bus just didn't come up very often.

The familiar sight of the red and white bus that we had been so accustomed to for many years faded away.

- Don Smith

Hassinger Oak Tree

When the massive white oak behind the Abingdon Tourism Center fell in a windstorm on January 11, it marked the end of an Abingdon landmark. But the Historical Society plans to convert a slice of the ancient oak into a public attraction highlighting the county's history for generations to come.

The slice will be preserved and put on display. The tree's rings will be counted to determine its age, and permanent markers will indicate the size of the tree's trunk on historic dates like 1776 and the Civil War. Our Local History Committee will select which dates will be commemorated.

It's estimated the tree was about 300 years old; if so, it was already well established when Native Americans hunted here. A tree ring count will give an accurate age.

On the day before the storm, by sheer coincidence, the town arborist measured the tree's height at 109 feet, and the average canopy spread at 101 feet, making it one of the tallest white oaks in Virginia according to Virginia Tech's Big Tree Program. The circumference of the trunk at a height of 4.5 feet was over 17 feet.

The tree is a fitting reminder of the importance of the timber industry to our county. In 1903 Hassinger Lumber Company of Pennsylvania purchased 6,000 acres of land around Konnarock in Washington County, and relocated their operations. The National Lumber Magazine reported in 1912 that Washington County was producing more lumber than the entire state of Pennsylvania.

Martin Luther Hassinger and his sons, John H., Luther C. and William A. Hassinger, purchased 24 acres of the Cummings Grove property in Abingdon where the tree stood. Bill and Almeda Hassinger built "The Grove" in 1906 and sold it to John and Eva Hassinger in 1913. Thomas Waters purchased the property in 1968 from the Hassinger estate, and sold it to Martin W. Swann in 1975. The Town of Abingdon purchased it in 1981, and has used it most recently as the town's tourism center.

Appalachian Reclaimed of Bristol is helping with the project. The slice will be air dried and treated for up to a year to hopefully avoid cracking. The display should be completed by early 2021. The final site of the future tourist attraction is still to be determined, but it could be placed in front of the Historical Society building on Main.

We'll keep you updated!



Hassenger House today; our tree slice being stored for drying; and HS volunteer Michael Henningsen at the base of the fallen giant.

Meet A Volunteer

Another invaluable volunteer at the Historical Society Library is Kathy Shearer.

Kathy began collecting oral histories in Washington County in the mid-1970s, when she worked with the Appalachian Oral History Project at Emory & Henry College. Several years later found her working in the coal-



fields of Russell County, where she started the Dante History Project to preserve the stories of a way of life that has largely disappeared. Her first book, *Memories From Dante*, appeared in 2001, and was roundly celebrated by several hundred people at the Dante Fire Hall. Four more books of community histories

followed, published by Clinch Mountain Press. Some of these books are available for purchase at the Historical Society and also Holston Mountain Artisans in Abingdon.

Kathy and her husband, Rees, take pleasure in working in their vegetable garden and hiking in the beautiful mountains. She is also actively involved at Holston Mountain Artisans. She enjoys volunteering at our library, meeting people who have a shared desire to preserve their own family histories, and reminding everyone: "Write it down now, while you still can!"

Thank you, Kathy, for your involvement in the Historical Society and the community!

Memories of Abingdon's Nursing Students

By Mary Jane Crosby

The first hospital in Abingdon was established in December 1905. In June 1912, the training school for nurses was opened. The history of these beginnings is written by Mrs. R. T. Stephenson in her *History of George Ben Johnston Memorial Hospital of Southwest Virginia* found in the September 1947 Historical Society Bulletin. In fact, not unlike the present time, the early beginnings were faced in the first months of 1920 with an epidemic of influenza. "All other work ceased at the hospital and its facilities were given to the influenza patients crowding its doors to overflowing... The doctors, nurses and everyone worked day and night..."

Mrs. Stephenson reports that the first 3 nursing students who graduated in 1914 were transfers from Johnston-Willis Sanatorium Training School for Nurses in Richmond, VA. According to an updated history written in 1991 by Margaret Ann Harris, a 1958 graduate of JMH, the nursing school closed in 1971 and 742 nurses had graduated.

According to the May 1951 Historical Society Bulletin from an address by Mary Beamer, the JMH nurses home by the 1930s, was MacMillan Hall, formerly a part of Stonewall Jackson College.



I was asked to write a story for the Historical Society Newsletter about the 3 years I spent at the nursing school. I solicited help from my nursing classmates to include some personal memories that would make an interesting story and tell some history of the school.

FRESHMAN CLASS OF 1960



Seated, left to right, are (FIRST ROW) Mary Bowers, Sonja Holbrook, Sheila Ballou, Wilma Meadows, Patricia Goss, Nina Farris, Carol Thomas, Elsie Miller, Mary Jane Lowry, Mary Kestner. (SECOND ROW) Levine Ruff, Donna Givins, Charlotte Lucas, Ruby Harris, Donna Ironside, Janice Russell, Carol White, Nell Moore, Barbara Rowe, Barbara Jones, Kay Short. (THIRD ROW) Carrie Johnson, Dianne Jett, Mary Helen Rowe, Carolyn Eubank, Frankie Barrett, Mary Helen Gessoe, Judith Henry, Barbara Rankin, Jeanette Bays. (FOURTH ROW) Dorothy Overbay, Nell Moore, Ann Mitchell, Norma Jesse, Judy Eller, Carolyn Gott, Laura Sproles, and Gladys Bridgman.

Nurses are the backbone of our health care system. We are all grateful for their unselfish service to others, especially in times of a health crisis. Mary Jane Crosby (LTC (Ret.) USAFR NC) graduated from the Johnston Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in 1963. Thank you all for your service, and for sharing these memories!

From Barbara Rankin Taylor: "It was Sunday, August 28th, 1960 and I had just had my 17th birthday twenty days before. It was an exciting time because it was the first day of my enrollment at Johnston Memorial Hospital School of Nursing. Our class of 38 met at the dormitory for the first time and were assigned our rooms and roommates. It was time to leave our homes and families and start our new lives. Living in the dorm was special for me because my family included an older and a younger brother, so having 'sisters' was a treat for me".

From Norma Jesse Ervin: "The hospital was built to serve the medical needs of rural southwestern Virginia and the surrounding states. I do not know if the original founders envisioned a school of nursing but one was soon established. It provided an opportunity for young women in the area to further educate themselves. I was one of those young women. Like many, my parents did not have the funds for me to enter a four-year college. My dream began as a young child to become a nurse. This hospital provided that opportunity for me. I remember the three years cost a total of \$320 which was paid on my day of moving into the dorm."

JMH School of Nursing was a 3-year diploma school for classroom and clinical experience. Our goal was to become Registered Nurses after first passing the Virginia State Board Examinations for Nurses.

The first few months were basic classes and lab skills, and we were excited to start our clinical training on the wards. A major milestone was reached when we were presented our nurses' caps and starched aprons in the spring of 1961.



Continued on page 5

What's Going On ...at the Historical Society?

One of the biggest ongoing projects at the Historical Society has been the preservation of newspapers published in the county.

Thanks to the foresight of Jane Oakes, in 2016 we purchased a rare collection of local newspapers, including the Washington County Journal (1912-1917), the Journal-Virginian (1919-1948), and the Glade Spring Citizen (1887-1893). The papers were obtained from the children of the late Charles and Martha Weisfeld, the editors of many of the newspapers. We have also obtained originals of the Washington County News and copies from microfilm of the Political Prospect (1812-1813), an Abingdon newspaper.

The Weisfeld Collection is an irreplaceable chronicle of the news and people of Washington County. The pages

include references to hundreds of county residents for whom there may be no other extant published references – a gold mine for historians and genealogists.

Dan Smith was hired as a part-time employee to scan these documents, thanks largely to a generous bequest from the estate of a local resident. A state-of-the-art Contex HD iFlex large-format scanner was purchased that makes it possible to scan an entire page of newsprint at one time without risk of damage. Since we began digitalizing this collection, Dan has scanned approximately 15,000 full-page images, approximately two-thirds of the collection. We expect it will take another year to complete the project. We have developed an in-house OCR scanning technology, similar to that used by Newspapers.com, which allows the public to search key words through our website and order clips of pages or articles. You can see examples of the results on page 6.

So that's what's going on at the Historical Society!



Continued from page 4

Norma continues, "Spring began the difficult classes of chemistry, anatomy and physiology. About 8 students did not pass these courses and had to leave. Our 2nd and 3rd years consisted of more difficult classes and greater responsibility for patient care."

Barbara recalls, "We worked up to 44 hours a week and also had classes. We worked varying shifts, but one of the most difficult was the night (11-7) shift and then having to report to an 8:00 A.M. class."

During the 3 years, we rotated through each area of the hospital and had classes in all the specialties that we would have on state board exams. This included Medicine, Surgery and Operating Room, Obstetrics and Labor and Delivery, Pediatrics, and Psychiatry. Our psychiatric training was at Western State Hospital in Staunton, VA where we spent 3 months on a rotating basis.

Our days were not all work and study as there were other activities like glee club, basketball, honor council, and newspaper and annual staff. There was always dorm life, playing card games, and having boyfriends call for us at the front door on weekends.

We all agree that we had received a top-notch education thanks to so many dedicated nursing instructors, supervisors, and physicians. After we passed our state boards and became



RN's, we felt very qualified wherever we worked. Many stayed locally, but others went to large medical centers, VA Hospitals, and the military.

We started with 38 students. For various reasons, 21 had to leave the program, but we graduated 17. We have since lost 6 to death. This is written in their memory and also in dedication to all the nurses who are on the front lines for COVID-19.

Sources:

Stephenson, Mrs. R. T., "History of the George Ben Johnston Memorial Hospital of Southwest Virginia", Historical Society

Bulletin, Fourteen, September 1947

Beamer, Mary Lynch Sanders, Stonewall Jackson College, "The Historical Society of Washington County, Virginia", Historical Society Bulletin, Eighteen, May 1951

Harris, Margaret Ann, CRNAP, 1958, JMH. "An Updated History of Johnston Memorial Hospital (1945-1995)". 4 April 1991

Johnston Memorial Hospital School of Nursing, The White Cap, 1961, 1962, 1963

Taylor, Barbara Rankin, RN, 1963, JMH School of Nursing, written account, April 2020

REUNIONS & Queries

ALL REUNION INFORMATION SUBJECT TO CHANGE

HAGY - Hagy Family Reunion at Fairview Farm, 908 Hillman Highway, Abingdon, 12pm Sept 5, 2020. There isn't a cost but bring your favorite food. Contact Cathy Hagy or go to the Fairview Facebook page for any updates or questions.

HONAKER - Descendants of Hans Jacob Honaker will gather on August 7-8, at Morehead, Kentucky, where Peter and Mary (Musick) Honaker lived. For more details, contact the "Honaker Family Association" on Facebook.

WALTON - The Walton Reunion will be August 2 at the Grayson County Fire Station. We will begin around 11-12. Bring a dish to share and any family photos you would like to find a home for this year. Contact Linda Lenhard with any questions.

GILL - William Gill had land grants on Moccasin Creek (1782), Sorrell's Creek (1786), and Copper Creek (1786). I cannot verify the connection to his descendants although believe he had a son named Joseph William Gill. Research shows that he has a large family living here today. If anyone has documentation to Joseph William Gill, please contact Joella Johnson Barbour. Thanks.

Do you have an upcoming family reunion or a research query you'd like to post? Send it in to us and we'll include it in the next newsletter, currently planned for September. Please include contact information with your request.

Women's Suffrage in SWVA

Women's suffrage wasn't a big local news story in Southwest Virginia. We only found two newspaper articles, dated Oct. 4 and 12, 1912, in the *Washington County Journal* on the women's suffrage campaign in Washington County.

Women won the right to vote nationally in 1920, but Virginia didn't ratify the 19th Amendment until 1952. Still, there was a statewide effort that reached Abingdon.

We've also searched for the 1920 poll book that would list the first women who registered to vote in Washington County, with no luck. If anyone knows where it is located, please let us know so we can preserve it and include that

information in the next newsletter or the Bulletin.

Did you have a female ancestor who signed the 1912 petition or voted in 1920? Let us know. We'd be glad to tell their stories in our next newsletter.

Two Notables on Woman's Suffrage Coming to Abingdon.

Miss Mary Johnston and Mrs. Ben Valentine, of Richmond, will be here Wednesday night, October 8th and address the citizens of the town and county on woman's suffrage. Miss Johnston is the Virginia novelist and Mrs. Valentine is a prominent and public spirited lady of Richmond. Both are leaders in the fight for woman's suffrage.

We bespeak for them a cordial reception in Abingdon and though woman's suffrage is most unpopular in the Southwest at present, conditions may change. We believe if the women of the Ninth District were allowed to vote it would go overwhelmingly democratic. This year the men will take the advice of the ladies in voting.

As a result of the very clear and logical speech of Miss Mary Johnston and the practical outline of the situation, in regard to suffrage presented by Mrs. B. B. Valentine, thirty-two signatures were secured for equal suffrage. The upper room of the county court house on last Thursday night was crowded to overflowing and Miss Johnston's speech was listened to with the greatest interest and satisfaction.

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Donations January 13, 2020 - May 10, 2020

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|---|-----------------------------------|
| Sanborn Map of Damascus, Virginia, 1925 | John K. Henderson, Damascus, VA |
| Washington Co., VA Will Book 6: 1827-1834 | Jack Hockett, Dover, DE |
| Washington Co., VA Will Book 5: 1820-1827 | |
| Washington Co., VA Will Book 4: 1812-1829 | |
| Floyd County, VA, Ministers' Returns, 1840-1863, pub. 1988 | Martha Keys |
| Some Virginia Marriages, 1700-1799, vol. 2, 1972 | |
| Watts Bar (TN) Reservoir Cemeteries, 1986 (TVA Records) | |
| Celebrating the Bradleys | Betty Ringley, Canton, GA |
| <i>Stories of My People- A Proud Hillbilly Legacy of Stanley, Buchanan, Burke & Yost Families</i> | Marsha Stanley, Oakton, VA |
| Christian Co., KY Marriage Records 1797-1850 | Kenneth Kestner, Abingdon, VA |
| Christian Co., KY Marriage Records 1851-1900 | |
| Kentucky Archives Johnson Co., Vital Statistics, 1843-1904 | |
| Marriage Licenses Applied-Stewart Co., TN | |
| Buckingham Co., VA Legal Papers 1765-1806 | |
| Cemeteries of Christian Co., KY 1797-2004 | |
| Cemeteries of the City of Newport News (Warwick Co., VA) | |
| Missouri Birth and Death Records | |
| Maryland Marriages 1778-1800 | |
| <i>Cherokee Roots</i> Vol. 2 | |
| Buckingham Burials Vol. 1 | |
| Annals of Floyd Co., KY 1800-1826 | |
| Frederick Co., VA Marriages 1738-1850 | |
| Charles Parish York Co., VA History & Register | |
| Lost Marriages of Buckingham Co., VA 1854-1868 | |
| Buckingham Co., VA Death Records 1853-1868 | |
| Wills & Administrations of Elizabeth City Co., VA 1688-1800 | |
| Tennessee Records Tombstone Inscriptions | |
| 1952 picture of Greendale-Bethel students in Washington, DC | Lee Sullins, Chester, VA |
| Picture of White's Mill, autographed basketball and Bethel team photos, copy of <i>The Spotlight</i> 1949 | |
| Booklet -Johnston Memorial Hospital, 1905-1964 | Chad and Susan Greer, Houston, TX |

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January 13, 2020—May 10, 2020

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200,000 CASES OF FLU.

Richmond, Va.—Word comes from Sydney, New South Wales, that there are 200,000 cases of "flu" in that Australian City, and that the doctors and nurses are utterly unable to cope with the great volume of disease.

Self-styled specialists in influenza may pretend to knowledge concerning a recurrence this year; but the fact is that no one knows whether we are to be revisited by the plague that swept over the country last fall and winter. The chances are in favor of a second outbreak since previous epidemics of grippé have run two seasons, but it is all guess work. The best that health authorities can do is to warn against a recurrence, and to publish all the knowledge they have on the subject. All that is known is very little, and can be summed up in a single sentence: "Flu" is carried in the secretions of the mouth and nose. That is the whole knowledge on the subject.

How the State Board of Health issues rules, which if followed, will prevent the transference of mouth and nasal discharges, and thus make the spread of "flu" impossible. First—protect others by using a handkerchief to cover a cough or sneeze or if no handkerchief is available, when coughing or sneezing, bend your head downward. Second—Protect yourselves by avoiding those who do not obey these rules, and do not put anything into your nose or mouth which may have come into contact with the mouths of others or may have been touched by your own or some other's hands.

The State Board is confident, as is the U. S. Public Health Service, that "flu" cannot be a menace if these rules are obeyed.

The 1918 Influenza Epidemic and Us

A lot of comparisons have been made between today's COVID-19 pandemic and the outbreak of influenza a century ago.

Lasting from early 1918 to the fall of 1919, the H1N1 influenza A virus infected about a third of the world's population. It was one of the deadliest pandemics in human history.

An article in the *Washington County Journal* dated Jan. 24, 1919, retrieved from the Historical Society's scanned newspaper collection, reported that the "(m) easles and influenza are still in the neighborhood but they are dying out to some extent. Our school has been hampered very much on account of them."


Other local news articles from those months listed the names of Washington County residents who were ill with the flu or who died from it.

The article on the left is from the same local paper, but is dated Sept. 26, 1919. It shows the influenza continued to be a concern both locally and internationally. A lot of the pre-vaccine recommendations - social distancing and proper hygiene - are the same ones we hear today.


History is not just a hobby for academics or old folks. We all can learn from history, good and bad. There's an old adage that those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it. But, beyond a generation or two, if our history is not preserved, it cannot be remembered - and preserving history in Washington County is the mission of this Historical Society.

That doesn't mean we'll solve all the world's problems, but maybe it can help us make a little more sense out of what's going on around us today.

Historical Society of Washington County, Virginia



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

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