

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. Visits to our library are down significantly from previous years, but we have reopened. As restrictions continue to ease, we look forward to a busy summer and fall.

More people, spending more time at home, have turned to the Internet for research; our website visits are up 18% from last year. Over 6,500 people are in our Facebook page, up 55% from this time last year, and they maintain a lively daily discussion about Washington County history. If you haven't joined us on Facebook, we invite you to do so.

The Society has three part-time employees, so we were able to secure PPP funding from the CARES Act to help cover their salaries and other expenses. We also were awarded a \$10,000 grant from Virginia Humanities to continue scanning and indexing images, and a \$2,500 grant for our African American conference on June 19 (see page 3). All three of our rental units are still leased, and our reserve funds survived the stock market drop without a net loss.

One of the goals we set in 2019 was to increase the number of dues-paid members by at least 40 by the end of 2020, bucking a trend in most historical societies. I'm pleased to report we have met and exceeded that goal. If we keep it up for four more years, we will have increased our membership revenue by 50% without raising dues.

Our Sinking Spring cemetery tour was canceled last summer along with the Virginia Highlands Festival. The festival is back for 2021, and so are we! See Page Six of this Newsletter for more details.



Annual Meeting Notice

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Board of Directors has voted to conduct our annual meeting as a hybrid virtual and in-person event. The meeting will begin at 6 pm on Saturday, June 26.

The live venue will be at the Higher Ed Center in Abingdon.

If you plan to attend in person, please RSVP how many will be in your party. That will enable us to make sure we have the right number of seats at the Higher Ed Center and meet whatever Covid-19 requirements are in place at that time..

Either email us at office@hswcv.org, subject "Annual Meeting," or call at 276-623-8337. Leaving a message is fine. ***Please make sure your 2021-2022 dues have been paid!*** If you have any questions or need assistance, contact our office. There are more details on the next page. Thank you for your cooperation!

Because of COVID, we were not be able to put on the "Conversation" program at the Barter Theatre in 2021. We plan to renew the program next February, and Monticello's Bill Barker is anxious to return as Thomas Jefferson.

We hope to install a slice of the Hassinger oak tree in front of our library this spring, along with a time line of historic events and improved landscaping. The exhibit promises to be an attraction for generations to come.

As we celebrate our 85th year, the Historical Society will adjust with the changing circumstances as we always have, keeping our focus on preserving and sharing the rich history of our county. The times are challenging, but with your support and our great team of staff and volunteers we will be successful

- Walter Jenny, President



The Rescue of Hiram Dooley's House



If you peek through the windows of the Hiram Dooley House in Abingdon, you'll be looking back in time to 1849.

One of the missions of the Historical Society is to encourage the preservation of historical properties, sites and artifacts in Washington County. A challenging situation arose earlier this year when we learned a local church had obtained a permit to demolish the house, which stood on property on Pecan Street the church had purchased a dozen years earlier. The church previously had removed two 19th Century houses from Main Street to build a parking lot.

The reaction from the community was quick. The Society's Facebook page lit up with objections. Relatives of previous owners begged for it to be saved. Local print and television media contacted the Society for comments. Historical Society President Walter Jenny asked the church to delay demolition until options could be discussed, and the Society's Board of Directors adopted a similar resolution. New Society member Toni Damon organized a petition on Change.org which resulted in almost 3,000 signatures; the petition and resolution were submitted to the church and town leaders.

So what is the Dooley house, and why is it important?

When Abingdon was just getting started, Pecan Street was the center of the community. Pecan tied into Green Spring Road near Town Creek, which provided access and water for Black's Fort. Green Spring follows an old Indian trail to the southwest. It's believed that wagon traffic from Pennsylvania to the frontier ran through the valley in which the railroad track now runs, so the "intersection" with Green Spring was prime property for the fort and the town.

Continued on Page 4



IN REMEMBRANCE

Diana (Moffett) Powell
1949 - 2020

*"The great tree reaches ever skyward
Its branches swaying with the changing winds of time,
Young leaves dancing in the summer sun
But let us not forget the rambling roots
Without them bending branches break
And new leaves are lost, one by one."*

Many of our members are familiar with Diana's work of love, the web page *Rambling Roots*, dedicated to the pioneer families of Washington County.

A section of the site, *Fallen Leaves*, begins, "Genealogy, by its very nature, is the story of those who have left us. Sometimes that includes fellow researchers we have come to know and care about." Diana is truly one of those leaves.

African American Conference Set For June 19

The Society's African American project, "Reclaiming Our History," will be the subject of a virtual conference on Saturday, June 19, 2021.

Volunteers with the Historical Society from around the country have been working to identify as many African American residents of our county before 1870 as possible, and locate as many of their living descendants as possible.

In 1870, 2,876 blacks, both free and enslaved, lived in Washington County - about 17% of the population of 16,816. Today, the African American population is about 806, about 1.5% of our total population of 53,740; only six Virginia counties have a lower percentage.

The "WashCoVA Family Tree" has been created on Ancestry.com for public research. Information from our county's 1866 cohabitation list, lists of free blacks, the 1867 voting register and census records have been added by Society volunteers. Ancestry's algorithms and hints help identify living descendants,

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 to build Washington County.

The keynote speaker for the conference will be Kenyatta Berry, host of the PBS program "Genealogy Roadshow." She is a published author and recognized expert on African American genealogy. Also making presentations are Dr. Jim Hagy and Dr. Jerry Jones, both of whom have written books about our county. We'll have stories about people like Dr. Bascom Slemple Waugh, a flight surgeon for the Tuskegee Airmen; long-time educators Frank Trigg and his son Dr. Harold Trigg, jazz great Frankie Newton, early Abingdon businessman Fincastle Sterrett, John Broddy of King's Mountain fame, and others. The conference is funded in part by Virginia Humanities.

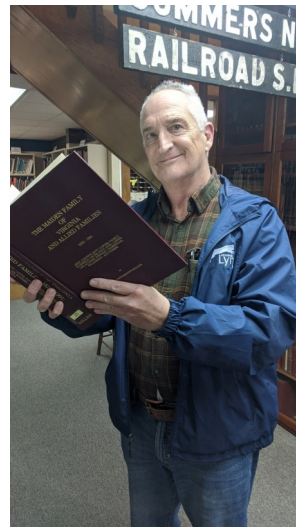
As the database grows, a live conference will be held in future years. Attendees will be invited to schedule their family reunions in Washington County and share their families' oral histories and photographs. The events will include genealogy workshops and other events.

All Society members are invited to participate. It will run from 11 am to 5:30 pm, but you can check the schedule and join for part or all of it. Register at [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) for \$25 plus a small fee (search for "Reclaiming Our History") and you'll be sent a link by email to join the conference.



The promotional material for the conference depicts (left to right) jazz great Frankie Newton, Dr. Bascom Slemple Waugh, Landon Boyd, Dr. Harold Trigg, and Frank Trigg - all of whom had ties to Washington County.

Meet A Volunteer



Bob Maiden has been a volunteer at the Historical Society library for the past four years.

He's an Abingdon native who graduated from Abingdon High School in 1969. He attended ETSU before he became a manager for Singleton's and Heck's stores in the area. Bob then worked in the car business for the next thirty years. He and his wife Frances raised three children along the way. His main hobby is collecting coins and supervising the birds around his home.

But what he enjoys the most is helping people find information at the Historical Society library.

Bob's family has deep roots in Washington County. John and Susannah (Landes) Maiden settled at what we now know as Maiden Creek in 1842. The library has a 700-page book on his kin, "The Maiden Family of Virginia and Allied Families 1623-1991," which was written by Sarah Finch (Maiden) Rollins.

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

Continued from Page 2

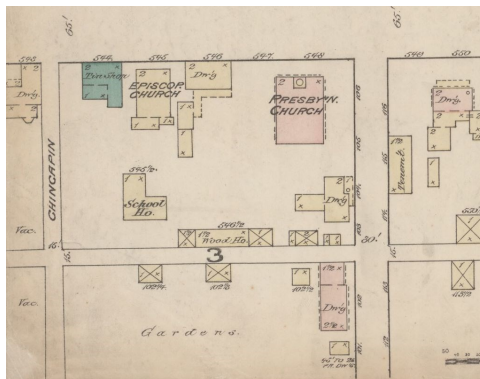
Land was money in those days, so it's no surprise that Washington County's first millionaire, William King, was involved in acquiring the choicest lots in the new town, both directly and indirectly. As Nanci King wrote in her book "Places in Time, Vol. II,"

Connally and Nancy King Findlay came to Abingdon from Ireland in 1796. With his brother-in-law, William King, Findlay acquired several lots on the south side of Main Street. On the west side of what is now Pecan Street, he built a large, 60' x 20' 2-story log house. By 1815 he had also built a 42' x 20' 1-story, part frame/part log dwelling house, a log kitchen, and a 24' x 18' 1 1/2 story frame storehouse.

Findlay's tanyard was located on the half-acre lot on the south side of Park Street and the east side of Pecan Street. On this lot was a 1-story frame boarding house, a saddler shop, smith shop, barn, stables, and currying shop. The tanyard operation at the back of the lot used a water wheel to supply water and power. A bark mill and bark shed were used for obtaining and storing the tanin used in the process. The original names of the adjoining street, Butcher and later Slaughter, were derived from Findlay's slaughter house, where animals were brought and their hides left behind for tanning into leather. The tanyard lot was sold to Col. James White in 1836.

This was the heart of Abingdon when Meriwether Lewis and William Clark passed through in 1806, returning from their expedition to the Pacific coast.

The Findlays' massive two story log home must have been impressive. The Findlays had seven children, but they were not in the house long. Nancy Findlay died in 1802 at age 32, and her father Thomas King died by 1807. William King died in 1808 at age 39¹, and Connally Findlay died in 1818. By 1828, the Findlay children were grown and on their own, so the property was sold to Hiram S. Dooley.



An 1885 Sanborn fire insurance map shows the Dooley house and other buildings in the vicinity.



More recent additions to the original house have been removed to make it ready to be relocated.

We don't know the condition of the log home, by now over 30 years old, but Hiram and his bride Sarah (Wallace) probably lived at first in one of the newer dwellings on the property that better suited their needs. Hiram was a painter, carpenter and furniture maker, and served on the Town Council. He found ready work in the Abingdon area.

Between 1836 and 1853 they also had seven children. By 1849, with a growing family, the Dooleys built their brick house on Pecan.

We also don't know exactly where the Findlay log home was, but the dimensions described by Nanci King are roughly the same as those of the Dooley house. There's a good chance the Dooley house rests on the site of the 1797 Findlay home. It's on higher land away from possible flooding from Town Creek, and it fronts close to the street which was common in those days. It also does not have a modern foundation, so Dooley might have just removed the log building and constructed their brick home in its place.

After their daughter Sarah died in 1857 at age 20, the Dooleys sold the home to Dr. Edward McDonald Campbell. It was his first home with his new wife Eleanor White. Dr. Campbell's uncle was Gov. David Campbell, who had built Montcalm nearby in 1827. Dr. Campbell was also a nephew of U.S. Treasurer John Campbell and a brother of Judge John Campbell. This house was undoubtedly at the center of the social and political life of early Abingdon, and today is the only remaining reminder along Pecan Street of the early history of the area.

Fast forward to the present.

After news spread of the impending demise of the Dooley house, several people expressed interest in helping. The church rejected suggestions to repurpose the house where it had stood for 172 years, so removal was the only option.



Visit us on Facebook!

Historical Society of
Washington County, VA



Heavy rains and wet ground threatened to delay the move. But on June 9, in front of media and about 200 spectators, the work crews slowly rotated the house, rolled it south across steel plates to Park Street, then west a hundred feet before backing it onto its new lot. A new foundation will be built under the house before it is lowered into place; the foundation will be faced with stone salvaged from the original foundation. The story was picked up by the Wall Street Journal and the Daily Mail in London.



Update



David and Jill Dalton stepped forward. They are in the process of bringing the William King home back to life, and own other properties in town, so it was a natural fit. The house is set to be moved on June 9 to a lot they own on Park Street, a short distance from its current site.

Because of the interest in saving the house, a GoFundMe account has been set up to help defray the considerable cost of moving it. Over \$8,000 from 67 donors has been donated so far, in addition to other private donations that have been made.

Thanks to the generosity of the Daltons and the community, and the cooperation of the Town, local media and the church, the Dooley house will continue to grace Abingdon's earliest neighborhood. But the saga is a reminder of the importance of vigilance. Too many pre-Civil War buildings have already been lost. They not only tell this town's remarkable history, but attract tourists

who are at the core of Washington County's economy and way of life. The roles of the Historical Society's members and friends in preserving our history for future generations cannot be overstated. Without them, Abingdon would too easily become just another dusty wayside with empty buildings and empty souls.

Thanks to everyone who was involved in this save. We hope it remains a gem in downtown Abingdon for another 172 years or more.



This undated photo of Aaron Dooley, 1840-1864, was provided by a family member. He was the third child and oldest son of the Dooleys, and grew up in the Dooley house. Aaron died at the Battle of the Wilderness and is buried at Fredericksburg VA. The article is from the Abingdon Virginian, May 27, 1864.

Aaron Dooley, son of Mr. Hiram Dooley, of this vicinity, was killed in one of the battles on the Rappahannock last week.

¹ When he died, William King owned 19,473 acres of land in Washington County and nineteen lots in Abingdon, in addition to over 3,494 acres in Wythe County and 10,880 acres and numerous town lots in Tennessee. By age 39, he was worth about \$25 million in today's money.



Sinking Spring Living History Tour



The Virginia Highlands Festival returns this summer, and so will our traditional Living History cemetery tour!

Volunteers with the Society will tell the tales of some of the dearly departed who are buried in Abingdon's legendary Sinking Spring Cemetery. The event is organized by the Society's Local History Committee as a fundraiser for the Society.

Guides will escort guests to several grave sites around the historic cemetery where volunteer interpreters will tell the story of their spirits. One site will include a dramatic skit with several actors - but we're not going to spoil it all. To get the good details, you'll have to show up and take the tour!

If you'd like to volunteer to help, contact either Mark Hagy or Martha Keys. We can always use a helping hand, either as a tour guide or to provide water for our stalwart spirits.

The tour is planned for July 31, 2021 beginning at 5:00 p.m., with the last tour beginning at 7:15. The cost remains at \$5.00 per person, and the public is welcome to vote for their favorite spirit in a penny jar. Groups will conform with whatever Covid-19 guidelines are in effect at the time.

The festival schedule also will include programs about history and genealogy as well as arts and crafts, antiques, music, writing, photography and lots more.

If you'd like to get some fresh air, a little exercise, and good entertainment for a good cause, include a tour of Sinking Spring cemetery in your plans when you visit the Highlands Festival!

FACEBOOK COMMENTS FROM PREVIOUS YEARS

"Great tour once again! I learned so much and all the spirits were great! Already looking forward to next year."

"What a novel idea to bring history to life!"

"Every spirit did a super wonderful job in this living history tour."

Courthouse Renovations Begin



The east wall of the 1820 James White house gets morning sunshine for the first time in over seventy years as demolition begins on the Elliott Building at 179 and 181 East Main Street.

Plans are underway for a major renovation and expansion of the Washington County Court House in Abingdon. To make room, the Elliott Building, just west of the court house, is being demolished.

Built after World War II, the building has housed a telephone company, the Commonwealth Attorney's office, and the Chamber of Commerce. They have no historical significance, and it was clear that the construction of new office space would be the best use of the space for the county.

Construction will take at least two years. County and town leaders are committed to make sure the old court house, which dates back to 1868, will remain the dominant feature in the complex.

Konnarock Institute Restoration



Ridge Discovery Center (BRDC).

The halls once filled with children are quiet now, replaced by workers who are bringing the bark-clad Konnarock Training School back to life as the home base of the Blue



The school was founded through the work of Lutheran missionary Kenneth Killinger and lay leader Laura Scherer Copenhaver. Their goal was to address the poverty they found in the mountains of Southwest Virginia.

Since 2008, the BRDC has been renovating the campus while building a world-class residential education facility, biological field station and interpretive center. They work primarily with Washington, Smyth and Grayson County public schools as well as the Galax City schools. In 2020 they offered summer, school and community programs, and counted 1,379 participants. Their restoration of the massive main school building, clad entirely in bark, is well underway; once complete, they will be able to expand their programs to the public.



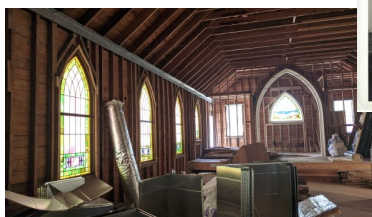
The dining hall, then and now



BRDC recently received a scrapbook of over 500 images from Sheila (Blevins) Brown and the Blevins family. The photos show the Institute in its heyday

between 1924 and 1959. BRDC is sharing the collection with us so we can preserve the images and help match names with as many faces as possible.

Go to <https://blueridgediscoverycenter.org> for more information about BRDC's impressive mission..



The chapel in 1928 and as it looks today while being restored by Blue Ridge Discovery Center.

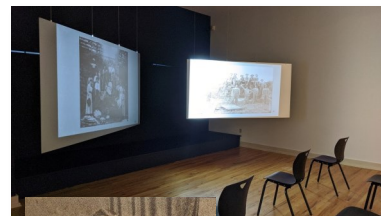
On Display...

The Historical Society continued to exhibit our holdings to the public in the last few months, despite the Covid pandemic.

In our exhibit room, Martha Keys created a remarkable display about the Stonewall Jackson Female Institute in Abingdon. The school occupied the home of Gov. John Floyd after his death. Classes began in 1868 for day and boarding students as young as seven years of age. The main buildings were destroyed by fire in 1914. It was renamed the Stonewall Jackson College, and closed in 1930 because of financial troubles. The exhibit included photos, artifacts and a yearbook from the school.



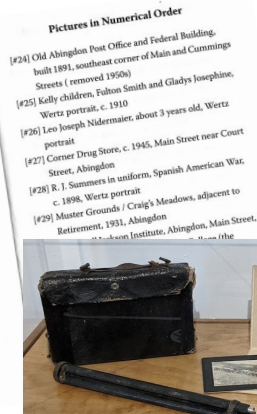
The Society now has a YouTube channel, and in September added a video about the making of sorghum syrup, an annual fundraiser by the Old Glade Antique Tractor Association at Fairview Farm. You can view the video by searching for "Sorghum Syrup At Fairview Farm." Video excerpts from "Reclaiming Our History" will also be posted there after the end of the conference, and other videos will be added in the future.



We also collaborated with William King Museum of Art in an exhibit entitled "Looking Back: Photographs of Early Washington County Virginia."

The museum used two rooms to project over two hundred photos taken by George N. Wertz (from our collection) and T.R. Phelps. Their life stories, and camera equipment of the day, were also on display. The exhibit ran from December 3 through March 10. You can see another video about the exhibit on our YouTube channel. Thanks to Rick Morgan

and Dan Smith for their roles in that project, and a tip of the hat to WKMA for hosting the exhibit.





The Historical Society
of Washington County, Virginia, Inc.
P.O. Box 484
Abingdon, VA 24212-0484

Thank you to our Business Partners and Sponsors!



DMDC, Inc.
Abingdon, VA



Clinch Mountain Press/
Kathy Shearer, Author-
Publisher



Corps Values
Music Heritage



The Martha
The Martha Washington Hotel & Spa



Historical Society of Washington County, Virginia

276-623-8337
office@hswcv.org

www.hswcv.org

341 West Main Street, PO Box 484, Abingdon, VA 24212

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

**VIRGINIA
IS FOR
HISTORY
LOVERS™**