

# Orange Oracle

An electronic bulletin from the Orange County Historical Society

## Edna Lewis historical marker unveiled



PHOTOS BY PHIL AND SUSIE AUDIBERT

The Historical Marker at Freetown on the Marquis Road. From left to right, Edna Lewis' nieces, Nina Williams Mbengue and Amelia Smith, Michael Carter of Africulture and Bruce Monroe, OCAHS President.

The wind howled, the logistics were daunting, but thanks to the organizational efforts of Julie Perry, Michael Carter and Bruce Monroe, the long-awaited Edna Lewis Historical Marker dedication ceremony went off without a hitch, April 13. The occasion would have been Ms. Lewis' 108th birthday and the location was her birthplace, Freetown, near Lahore, Virginia.

Among the speakers at the ceremony was the Director of the Virginia Department of Historic

Resources, Julie Langan. She told the 50 or so attendees that "a little pot of money," had been set aside by the General Assembly "to diversify the subjects that are included in the marker system." Acknowledging that there has been an "imbalance" in that system, she drew applause when she said the Edna Lewis marker is "an appropriate use of these funds."

The keynote speaker was Nina Williams Mbengue, Edna Lewis' niece, who travelled from Den-

ver, Colorado to attend the event. "Freetown was Ms. Lewis' 'North Star,'" said Mbengue. "Not only was it the place where she was born, but it was also the place where she learned how to cook. Ms. Lewis' memories of growing up in Freetown helped to preserve an important historical time period and, through a culinary lens, provide us with insight into the lives, hopes and dreams of a community recently freed from chattel slavery. Her memories also established Southern regional cuisine as an American classic and in so doing gave us a blueprint for today's farm-to-table movement."

The proceedings of the ceremony and marker unveiling can be viewed in their entirety by clicking on this link: <https://youtu.be/e7clOm74h34>



Julie Langan, Director of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources



Nina Williams Mbengue, Edna Lewis' niece.

# Montpelier fire!

This horrifying image of the Montpelier Archaeology Building on fire comes to us courtesy of *The Daily Progress*. According to the Orange Volunteer Fire Department, damage was limited to the porch, attic and office inside. "Extensive salvage and overhaul operations were required to save and salvage all artifacts contained in these facilities," reads a press release from the fire company, and



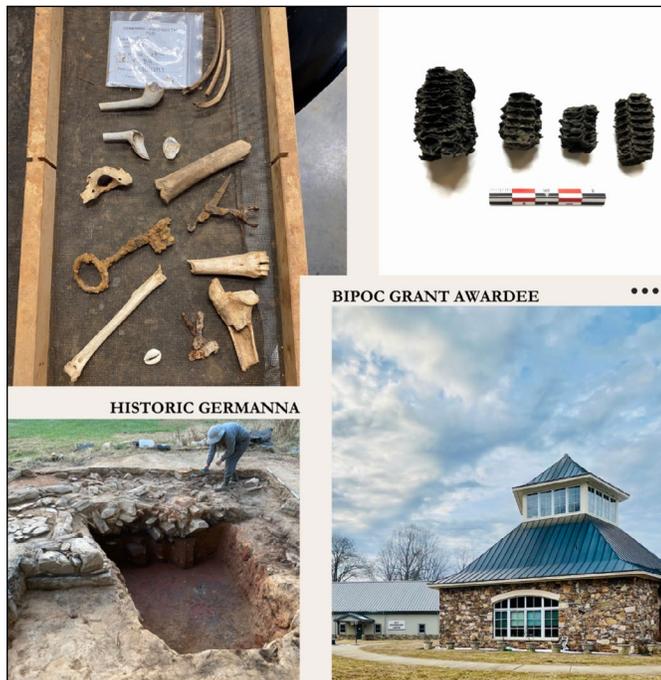
Orange Fire Chief, Whit Jacobs, is quoted as saying that there was no damage to the extensive James Madison artifacts in display cases and in catalogued storage containers. There is still no word on what caused the blaze.

## Germanna in line for \$292,000 grant

Historic Germanna has been recommended for a Virginia Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BI-POC) Historic Preservation Fund grant, pending the Governor's signature. The Orange County historic foundation is one of nine statewide to share a total of \$2.5 million in grant funds. Germanna's share is \$292,510.

If approved, the money will go towards Germanna's BIPOC Archaeology, Engagement and Research project, which "encourages community engagement across sectors and facilitates the exploration and recognition of all of the stories intertwined with Germanna's past."

According to the Department of Historic Resources, "The purpose of this legislation is to create a grant program to protect and support



the Commonwealth's historically underserved and underrepresented communities as well as the cultural and historical sites associated with them." But, DHR also cautions, "Due to a discrepancy between the legislation language and the 2022-2024 biennium budget language, DHR will not be able to begin funding dispersal for the awarded projects until the budget is signed by the governor, most likely before June 30, 2024." Stay tuned.

In other Germanna news, Saturday, April 27 has been set aside to celebrate the Siegen Forest Conservation Easement dedication. They'll also celebrate the opening of the new public boat launch on the Rapidan River. Festivities get underway at 10 a.m. and continue until 4 p.m.

# Spring Clean-up a success!

By Patrick Colby

Due to the difficulty in finding a date that would work for enough volunteers, this year's OCHS Spring Cleanup did not entail the usual 'Saturday Morning Madness.' Rather, a list of jobs was circulated among Board members to choose from and to be accomplished at their convenience. It proved to be an excellent approach; all jobs were quickly spoken for; most are already complete. Thanks to Lynne Lewis for the idea, and to all the volunteers for their willingness to roll up their sleeves!

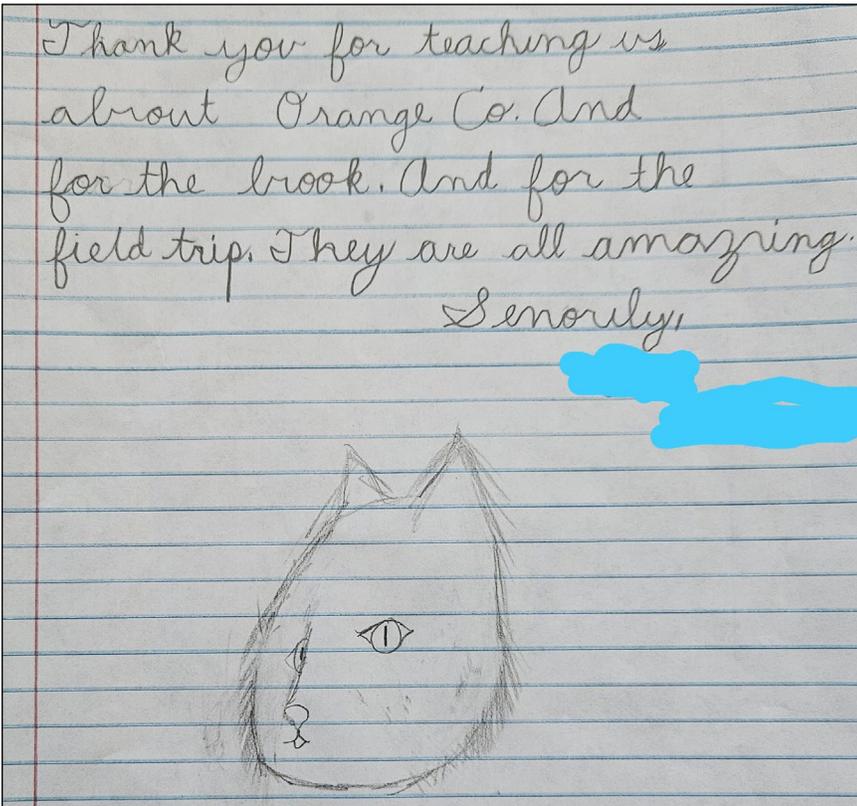


PHOTO BY PATRICK COLBY

Pat McAloon polishes the mail slot; clean windows, sills, and fresh flowers courtesy of Margaret Hill.

## 4th-graders visit historical society

By May Saxton



OCHS recently received several thank you notes from fourth grade students in the Orange County Public School system. These notes expressed gratitude for their individual copies of *The Nine Lives of an Orange Tabby*, which were distributed earlier this year. This note was received from a student at Lightfoot Elementary School, who also visited the James Madison Museum and the Orange County Historical Society on a recent field trip. While at OCHS, Judy Peterson shared with the students the history of their school and some interesting facts about Isabella Lightfoot. Jayne Blair demonstrated methods of using primary research sources. She also provided information about Sandra Speiden's Native American artifacts that the students viewed while in the OCHS auditorium.

# 2024 program schedule

*(Dates and times are subject to change)*



Pamunkey Church

## > Sunday, May 26, 3 p.m. History of North Pamunkey Baptist Church

Jennifer Conley (OC Historical Society Board member and Prospect Heights Middle School teacher) will give a presentation on the history of this church and congregation. North Pamunkey was the second Baptist church founded in Orange County by Elijah Craig. Founded in 1774, this year marks its 250th anniversary. Learn about its founding, early members, and its legacy in the Lahore community. Bring a picnic and your lawn chair. In the case of rain, the picnic will be canceled, but the presentation will move indoors. Meet at North Pamunkey Baptist Church on Lahore Rd., 15109 Pamunkey Lane, Orange, VA.

## > Sunday, June 30, 3 p.m. A Boy, a Dream and the Orange County Pilots Who Shaped His Destiny

Russ Roberts came to Orange County in 1969 when his folks

took over the operation of the Orange County Airport. From that experience, Russ found the path to his dream of becoming a professional pilot. He will talk about his important mentors, the local pilots who shaped him, not only as a pilot but as a person. Meet at the Sandra and William H. Speiden Auditorium, 130 Caroline St., Orange, VA.

## > Sunday, July 28, 5 p.m. Marshall Farms: An Automated Dairy Operation

Keith Marshall will conduct a tour of the high-tech Marshall Farms organic dairy operation. Meet at Marshall Farms, 8494 Zachary Taylor Hwy., Unionville, VA. Bring a picnic.

## > Sunday August 25, 3 p.m. The Culpeper Minute Men in the Revolutionary War

Bill Schwetke, of Sons of the American Revolution, will present a history of the Culpeper Minutemen militia and their role in the Revolutionary War. In mid-1775, the Culpeper Minutemen militia was created by volunteers from Culpeper, Orange, and Fauquier Counties to fortify the revolutionary task force operating at Great Bridge, VA. The minutemen were under the command of Culpeper's John Green and were attached to the 1st VA Regiment (Continental Line) under the command of Patrick Henry. Meet at the Sandra and William H. Speiden Auditorium, 130 Caroline St., Orange, VA.

## > Sunday, September 29, 3 p.m. Rebuilding Menokin

Sam Biggers of Dominion Tradi-

tional Building Group will give a presentation on the ongoing reconstruction of Menokin, a well-known example of colonial-era Georgian architecture in Virginia. This innovative rebuilding effort combines traditional materials and methods with modern ones. Dominion Traditional Building Group has been involved in the documentation and rebuilding of Menokin for more than six years. Meet at the Sandra and William H. Speiden Auditorium, 130 Caroline St., Orange, VA.

## > Sunday, Oct. 27, 3 p.m. Sandra Speiden: Mounds, Indian Pipes and Preservation

Bill Speiden will give a presentation on how his late wife, Sandra, used her platform to advance the cause of archaeological and historic preservation in Orange County and beyond. Meet at the Sandra and William H. Speiden Auditorium, 130 Caroline St., Orange, VA.

## > Sunday, Nov. 24, 3 p.m. Implications of Recent 3-D Scanning of the Barboursville Ruin

Will Rourk, 3D specialist with the University of Virginia Library, will detail the results of laser scanning of the ruins of the Barboursville mansion and its adjoining landscape. Meet at the Sandra and William H. Speiden Auditorium, 130 Caroline St., Orange, VA.

## Membership

Interested in Orange County history? Become a member of the historical society. Visit [www.orangecovahist.org](http://www.orangecovahist.org).



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# Orange County Review

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## 50 years ago: Page 1 of the *Orange County Review*

### April 4, 1974

If it's not the Comprehensive Plan, it's the faulty water line between Orange and Gordonsville; one or the other seems to dominate the news in early 1974. This time it's the pipeline that was rejected earlier in the year and the various meetings that were held to rectify the situation. At this particular meeting, all interested parties were present, including the president of the embattled Pierce Ditching Company that built the line. Before it went into executive session, Mack Slaughter was quoted as saying this project was "the worst deal I've been involved with since I started in the pipelaying business in 1945."

### April 11, 1974

And so, an agreement was reached on the faulty pipeline. Basically, Pierce offered to "reinstall the line at no charge for labor." Materials were a

different matter, however. FHA representatives said loan money could be made available to cover the materials cost, but the Rapidan Service Authority pointed out that because it couldn't sell any water, it doubted it could generate enough income to repay that loan.

In other news, the school board introduced a brand-new program to the county: Early Childhood Stimulation. It "would be made available to handicapped and underprivileged tots three and four years of age," reads the article.

### April 18, 1974

The Highway Department proposed replacing the bridge over the railroad tracks just west of Montpelier. This is Rt. 639, Chicken Mountain Road. The original bridge was built in 1914. "A resulting steep arch at center of the bridge thus makes for hazardous crossing by vehicular traffic," reads the curious-worded article.

*Editor's note: It seems to us that the "new" bridge didn't do much to improve the "steep arch at center of the bridge."*

### April 25, 1974

A lawsuit was filed against the Orange County Board of Supervisors for being "arbitrary and capricious" in denying an application for a 15-unit mobile home park on a 280-acre tract of land. The issue had become something of a bellwether in the ongoing growth-versus-no growth dispute in the county.

Also on page one of this issue is a paragraph announcing that Edna Lewis is writing a "book on her Virginia childhood" that will be published in 1975 by Knopf. The blurb goes on to say, "Mrs. Lewis will go to Swaziland, South Africa this summer to attend a princess' wedding."

*Editor's note: that came as news to us. However, we recently learned that she did not go on that trip, although she had befriended a prince from Swaziland in New York.*

## Call for volunteers

Would you be interested in transcribing and indexing the names (primarily customers) of a fascinating Rapid Ann general store ledger, dated April 2, 1883 – July 31, 1884? If you would like to take a look at this recently digitized ledger, it is accessible to OCHS members at <https://www.orangecovahist.org/research-member>. Nonmembers can view it on a computer at the Research Center. If you are interested or would like more information, contact Volunteer Coordinator May Saxton at [OCHistVolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:OCHistVolunteers@gmail.com).

## Bloomsbury Dendrochronology Tour slated for April 27

Bethany Sullivan, of the James Madison Museum, tells us that the long-awaited Bloomsbury dendrochronology report will be made public on April 27, starting at 10 AM, when local historian and author, Ann Miller, will conduct a room-by-room tour of the historic Orange County structure. Tickets for the tour are \$35 each and can be obtained from the James Madison Museum at 540-672-1776.



PHOTO BY PHIL AUDIBERT

## History-to-Go

### Edna Lewis Historical Marker dedication

The entire proceedings of the April 13 Edna Lewis Historical Marker dedication can be viewed by clicking on this link: <https://youtu.be/e7clOm74h34>

### Implications of Casualties at the Battle of Chancellorsville for the Army of Northern Virginia

This view of a hospital room at Ellwood played a key role in the presentation last month by

Robert Lookabill. His extensive research explores the implications of the casualties at the Battle of Chancellorsville on Robert E. Lee's future military plans. You can see the entire program by clicking on this link: <https://youtu.be/4yUBTMaj91Q?si=pJOGm-MOL69hYZ07>



### Holladay House History and Architectural Tour

University of Mary Washington professor, Michael Spencer talks about the architecture of Holladay House. This episode of History-to-Go has been delayed. We'll let you know as soon as it is ready for viewing.