

Orange County Historical Society



Annual Meeting

January 26, 2020

From the President

Having bid farewell to 2019, it is time to consider all that transpired during the past year. There were numerous events and accomplishments that brought smiles, but we would be remiss if we did not note, with great sadness, the passing of Henry Lee Carter. A member of the Historical Society's Board of Directors, Henry Lee was always a gentleman and a scholar, in the truest sense of those words. We, along with so very many others, will miss Mr. Carter.

Our membership remains at almost 400 and our visitors, while hailing mainly from Virginia, also come from around the country—from Oregon to New York. These members and visitors continue to be ably served by our dedicated staff: Jean McGann, Jayne Blair and Ruth Mallory Long. Those are the voices you hear when you call and those are the smiling faces people see when they come in the door. We are grateful for their knowledge, hard work, and dedication.

We continue to be blessed with a dedicated and hardworking Board of Directors. This year we again had a presence at the annual Germanna reunion conference held at the Daniel Technology Center in Culpeper. We sold books and DVDs, and Phil Audibert showed his production documenting the history of Germanna. We again hosted the annual 4th Grade Poster Day in cooperation with the Orange County public school system. On November 1, the Historical Society hosted a Meet and Greet, organized by Shelley Murphy, interim director of the Albemarle-Charlottesville Historical Society. It was attended by Albemarle, Fluvanna, Madison, Greene and Buckingham County historical society representatives, usually the president or the director. We exchanged information and ideas on how our organizations might help one another.

This year marks the beginning of the Orange County Historical Society's 55th year in existence (and 54th year as an incorporated entity), and we continue to make strides in updating and greening our Research Center. With the help of our generous members, we replaced the ceiling in the main room and the auditorium, and converted the light fixtures to LED units, during which process we were able to hide most of the computer cabling. Having taken all the artwork off the walls while the overhead work was going on, we took the opportunity to rearrange most of the pictures—although Governor Spotswood retains his pride of place.

We are honored and grateful that people continue to entrust us with their collections, enabling access to ever increasing areas of our history. Thank you.

Lynne Lewis

Treasurer's Report

The Orange County Historical Society sustains itself through the generosity of its members and the Orange community. Our income is derived primarily from our annual fund drive, membership dues, and investment income. We have been fortunate in the last few years to receive two much-appreciated small grants from the Town of Orange and from the County. Finally, we generate some income from the sale of our publications.

In 2019 our Annual Fund Drive donations totalled \$10,685.00 while membership dues totaled \$8,800. This will allow us to complete the last major element of our interior renovations to the Research Center—the new front counter that will make a more gracious impression on visitors and members and will better display our books and DVDs. It will also fund the purchase of a much-needed new, modern Microfilm reader.

Our operating income, \$45,710.14, less our expenses, \$48,469.92 resulted in a net loss of \$2,759.78 for the year. However, and more importantly, we are starting the new year with checking and savings of over \$12,125.66, while total other current assets amount to more than \$331,121.92.

We are in a good financial position to continue to perform our mission to promote, preserve and disseminate the richness of our history to our community and our visitors. We will be able to continue meeting our goals and completing our mission without diminishing our endowment.

Richard Durphy

Committee Reports

Building and Grounds Committee

Although our 2018 fund drive was not sufficient to finance all our planned improvements to the Research Center, we were able to complete a number of projects that were definitely needed. After accepting several bids, we contracted with the Ceiling and Floor Shop of Charlottesville to replace our drop-in ceiling. Once the ceiling was installed, we discovered that we are experiencing some leaks around the roof vents in the auditorium. Fortunately, the leaks are minor and occur only when we have blowing rains.

The other major project was replacing the overhead fluorescent and incandescent lighting with a new LED grid and can lights. These were installed by Blackburn's Electric and, along with the new ceiling tiles, make our areas brighter—and greener—than ever.

We continue to reap rewards from our new HVAC system installed in

2017. It is saving us \$700 per year on utility expenses. To enhance our programs in the auditorium, we purchased a new projector with some specific contributions from our membership. New LED exit and emergency lights have been installed. The old style fixtures with bulb replacements had become a real nuisance and expense to maintain.

Hopefully, this year we can get our new reception desk installed after the fund drive requirement for a new microfilm machine is met.

Under the Board of Directors' leadership and the membership's generosity, we are updating the Society so that not only it will be a place for all to enjoy, but also will leave a smaller footprint on the environment.

Paul Carter

Collections Committee

Several interesting items were added to the Orange County Historical Society's collection this year. The research library has been enhanced with the donation of a five-volume *Slave Birth Index (1853-1865)*, thanks to Jayne Blair, and *My Grandfather's Letters*, a book about an Orange county family, given by Marcia Hovenden. We also received the gift of a 1932 Gordonsville High School yearbook from Al Delaney. We appreciate all gifts to the collection, which increase the usefulness of the Historical Society to our research patrons, both now and into the future.

Hilarie Hicks

Education/Outreach Committee

In 2019 the Committee saw some progress on the education and outreach front, but with plenty more yet to do. Committee members met with Orange County Public Schools Curriculum Directors Renee Honaker and Judy Anderson in early March to offer the historical society's expertise to bring Orange County's unique history to the school system. In particular they offered to conduct an in-service program for new and returning teachers in early August. Unfortunately, because the number of in-service days was cut in half, there was no room left on the calendar. Committee members hope for better results in 2020. Also, once the new headmaster is settled in, the committee hopes to offer a similar program to Grymes Memorial School.

Committee Chair Phil Audibert spent a good part of 2019 working on his "Memories" oral history project. So far 20 interviews have gone through the editing and compiling process and have been uploaded to the AHHA Productions YouTube site, including *Memories: Greatest Hits Part 1* (also presented as the November program). In addition, Audibert delivered an address to the

Chamber of Commerce Annual Banquet urging citizens to collect oral histories themselves. He conducted a video camera training session for the public and spoke to the Board of Directors of the George Washington Carver High School Museum about setting up a similar oral history project for Carver alumni.

Phil Audibert

Program Committee

In 2019 we continued our tradition of presenting programs on a wide variety of historical subjects.

Our January 2019 Annual Meeting included a showing of Phil Audibert's recent documentary, *Germanna . . . America in Embryo*, which explored the many important stories surrounding the original Germanna settlement. Then, as customary, there was no February meeting.

The March meeting, *Oral History in Louisa County*, featured a presentation on the current Louisa County project, aimed at recording the story of the county in the 1950s through the memories of their residents. Karleen Kovalcik, Executive Director of the Louisa County Historical Society, discussed the protocols and pitfalls of conducting oral history, and provided pointers, suggestions, and inspiration for undertaking a project of this type.

For our April meeting, Frank Walker presented *Gold Mining in the Virginia Wilderness*. This program covered the mining history of the Wilderness area of eastern Orange and western Spotsylvania, once one of the top-producing gold mining areas of the U.S., and with an overall production history lasting from about 1827 to 1937. Frank covered highlights of some of the major mines, as well as stories of the people who "mined" investors as well as the ground.

As usual, our "May" meeting was held in early June to avoid conflict with Memorial Day. Our program, *Margraten/Market Garden: Honoring the Fallen* had been produced to mark the 74th anniversary of World War II's Operation Market Garden, which took place in The Netherlands in the fall of 1944. Over 8,000 fallen Americans from that operation, and from subsequent efforts to end the war, are interred in the Netherlands American Cemetery and Memorial at the town of Margraten. This inspiring video presentation told the story of how the fallen soldiers' burial sites are still being cared for by local families, in gratitude for their sacrifice.

Our planned June picnic, scheduled for Maplewood Cemetery near Gordonsville, was unfortunately rained out by a torrential downpour. (A Maplewood picnic will be rescheduled for 2020.) The July picnic took place at Monteith, home of Kevin and Carla Passarello near Gordonsville. The present impressive Greek Revival house, built circa 1844, has an interesting history and

numerous original architectural features.

We closed the picnic season with an August evening at Springfields, west of Gordonsville, the home of Gail Babnew and Joel Silverman. The property features a fine Colonial Revival house (built in 1895 to replace an 18th century structure that burned), and has an extensive complement of 19th and 20th century outbuildings.

In September, we gathered for *160 Games: The Lost Ballplayers of Orange*. “Baseball Bloggers” Jackie Howell, Orange’s own local baseball historian and award-winning blogger, shared stories of three baseball big-leaguers with ties to Orange County.

October brought a nod to Halloween with *Superstitions, Charms & Luck*, led by Lynne Lewis and Ann Miller, along with enthusiastic audience participation. The presentations included Orange County’s only known witchcraft accusation, as well as local ghost stories, various traditional beliefs for both good—and bad—luck, and even the on-site manufacture and demonstration of dowsing rods.

Our November program featured the premiere of Phil Audibert’s video documentary *Memories: Greatest Hits Part 1*, highlighting seven of Phil’s favorite oral history interviews of Orange County residents from his ongoing “Memories” oral history project.

Ann Miller

Publications Committee

During 2019 the Historical Society published two issues (Vol. 50, No. 1 & 2) of our newsletter, *Record*, and began consideration and prioritization of several publications that are in need of reprinting. We distributed copies of *The Nine Lives of an Orange Tabby* to all Orange County 4th graders. This marks the 13th year that this publication has been given out, free of charge.

Lynne Lewis

Special Projects

Joint African American Land Ownership Research Committee

Board member committee members from the Historical Society and the African-American Historical Society continued to research black land ownership. Of particular interest was Liberty Acres, on Rt. 33 just east of Ehearts Corner. A road sign there, which sparked interest in this area, marks a neighborhood of many black land owners which turns out to have been a white-owned subdivision whose owner worked out of Gordonsville. He sold lots

in the late 1800s to African-Americans who owned a number of small farms around Eheart's Corner and along Ridge Road (Rt. 644).

Tracing black land ownership is bogged down in the 1870s for the moment, frustrating the goal of finding free-black land ownership pre-dating the Civil War. Bill Speiden and Maher Washington currently are focusing on Hampstead Farm lands (owned by George W. Barbour in the 1930s) from the Rapidan towards Barboursville. Mr. Washington's mother lived on Hampstead.

Bill Speiden, Maher Washington, and Phil Audibert recorded three oral histories from Orange County residents.

Bill Speiden

Statistics

☛ We have 389 members.

☛ We hosted 899 visitors.

The majority came from Virginia, but 24 other states were also represented. Maryland and North Carolina were home to the second and third most frequent visitors, but we had visitors from as far afield as Alaska, British Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

☛ Book sales for the year totalled \$2,572.09.

☛ 338 phone calls, over 200 mail queries, and numerous email requests answered, Volunteers devoted hundreds of hours to various projects.



While replacing the ceiling tiles, workers found this flat iron resting on one of the ceiling joists. No one knows when or why it was placed there. Photo courtesy of Lynne G. Lewis.

The Orange County Historical Society

Founded in 1965, the Orange County Historical Society, Inc., is a research, archival, and educational organization dedicated to the discovery, preservation, and dissemination of the history of Orange County, Virginia, of its people, and the surrounding area.



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*The photo on the front of our Research Center at 130 Caroline Street
is courtesy of Lynne G. Lewis.*