

# Orange Oracle

An electronic bulletin from the Orange County Historical Society

## Community Archaeology Lab at Montpelier grand opening is May 9 Oral histories sought

By Matt Reeves

The Montpelier Archaeology Department is moving to the old Montpelier Supply Company store (Esso building on Route 20) and will host its grand opening on May 9 at noon. On this date



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMES MADISON'S MONTPELIER  
**The old Montpelier Store in 1911. On May 9, it will become the new home of the Montpelier Archaeology Department.**

we plan to open to the public the Community Archaeology Lab at Montpelier (CALM). We will have exhibits, artifact cases, and we will offer tours of the building. All of this will be available to the public for free! We look forward to welcoming the Orange community to this space.

We have spent the last sev-

eral months working with local contractors to restore the woodwork and old store features to their original condition. We hope this will spark memories of bygone years from the local community.

As part of this grand opening, we will work with the

Montpelier Descendants Committee's Oral History Collaboration Team to conduct interviews with community members who have memories of the old store when it was in operation during the duPont ownership era (1901-1983). On May 9, we will be collecting oral histories at the old store, and we invite the Orange community

to take part by sharing their memories, photographs, and documents to build a better understanding of how this landmark was used.

If you have memories to share, please fill out the following form: <https://forms.gle/FX8fXRRRA8tHnZ8nM9>

Or give Matt Reeves a call at 540-406-0443.

## OCAAHS annual meeting, program notes

By Bruce Monroe

On the cold and windy afternoon of February 16, the Orange County African American Historical Society held its annual membership meeting at the Arts Center in Orange. This year's gathering was particularly special, marking the organization's 25th anniversary.



PHOTO COURTESY  
BRUCE MONROE

**Incoming OCAAHS  
president, Mary  
Terrell Freeman**

President Bruce Monroe took a moment to recognize two founding members: Rebecca Coleman and the late Carolyn French. A key item on the agenda was the presentation and approval of the Board of Directors for the 2025 term. This meeting also marked a significant transition, as president Monroe

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PHOTO COURTESY BRUCE MONROE

Montpelier Descendants Committee Executive Director, Greg Monroe Jr. (left) with outgoing OCAAHS president Bruce Monroe.

## OCAAHS *continued from page 1*

presided over his final annual gathering. The Board of Directors selected Mary Freeman to fill the position of president, and she graciously accepted the appointment. The board also named Pa’trice Day-Owens vice president and approved the nomination to the board of Denise Thompson. Monroe expressed his gratitude for the support he has received during his tenure and encouraged members to extend the same level of cooperation to Freeman as she leads the organization into the future.

This year’s special presentations featured distinguished guest speakers who provided powerful insights into African American history and heritage. Jennifer Hurst-Wender, Executive Director of Historic Germanna, and Kelly Arford-Horne, Archaeology Site Director, shared their research on the enslaved Gordons, detailing their re-

markable journey to freedom and eventual emigration to Liberia.

Additionally, George Monroe, Jr., Executive Director of the Montpelier Descendants Committee, joined Dr. Andrea Roberts from the UVA Center for Cultural Landscapes to present an innovative digital mapping project. Their work offers a groundbreaking approach to preserving African American history.

With new leadership and exciting projects on the horizon, the Orange County African American Historical Society continues to honor the past while building a brighter future. For a recording of the livestream of the annual meeting, click here: [OCAAHS 2025 Annual Meeting](https://youtu.be/4TSSPx5J-dUg?si=ad8_OzMVr1LZBoTM).

*Editor’s Note: Mary Freeman was the subject of a Memories Oral History episode. Click here to view: [https://youtu.be/4TSSPx5J-dUg?si=ad8\\_OzMVr1LZBoTM](https://youtu.be/4TSSPx5J-dUg?si=ad8_OzMVr1LZBoTM)*

# 2025 program schedule

*Dates and times are subject to change.*

## > Sunday March 30, 3:00 PM

Prelude to Yorktown 1781- Lafayette vs. Cornwallis in Virginia. Presentation by historian Andrew Gutowski on the military movements of Generals Lafayette and Cornwallis as they positioned their armies at Yorktown in 1781.

## > Sunday April 27, 3:00 PM

Military and Political Career of Gov. General James L. Kemper

## > Sunday, May 11, 3:00 PM

Religious Liberty in the Virginia Piedmont

## > Sunday, June 29, 5:00 PM

Rocklands Farm Museum (picnic)

## > Sunday July 27, 3:00 PM

History of the Montpelier Hunt Races (picnic)

## > Sunday, August 24, 3:00 PM

Virginia Indians in the Piedmont

## > Sunday, September 28, 3:00 PM

Germanna Archaeology (picnic)

## > Sunday, October 18, 3:00 PM

Dr. John Leland & Virginia’s Baptists

## > Sunday, November 16, 3:00 PM

Virginia Indian Eel Pots

## > No December Program

All programs will be held at the Sandra and William H. Speiden Auditorium, 130 Caroline St., Orange, VA, unless otherwise noted. For programs being held in the auditorium, please be in your seats no later than 2:55 PM. Livestreaming starts promptly at 3:00 PM.

# Montpelier reopens

Montpelier's annual winter closure has come to an end! On March 13, we resumed our normal operating hours: 9:00 AM-4:00 PM, Thursday-Monday. Learn more about our offerings and plan your visit [here](#). Review our [visitor guidelines](#) to ensure you have a wonderful experience. We look forward to welcoming you back!



## TOURS

**Highlights of Montpelier-** Thursday-Mondays beginning March 13, 10:00 AM-3:00 PM, (Free for members, \$36/Adult, \$16/Youth (12-17), \$8/Child (5-11) Free/age 4 and under). Explore the histories and legacies of James and Dolley Madison, the Enslaved Community, and the Constitution while touring the Madison home. Purchase tickets [here](#).

**Enslaved Community Tour-** Saturdays and Sundays beginning March 15, 1:30 PM. Free admission with tour or property pass purchase. This walking tour of significant sites examines one of America's largest paradoxes: a nation where "all men are created equal," built by those who were denied the exact freedoms they were laboring to establish.

## Call for Volunteers:

### *Short-term postcard project*

We are looking for one or two volunteers for a short-term project! The Historical Society has a collection of interesting local postcards. Tasks to be completed: 1. Organizing postcards into categories (street scenes, courthouse scenes, homes, churches, etc.) 2. Placing them in archival quality sleeves to be filed in notebooks. Take this opportunity on this short-term project to become more involved with our Society! If you are interested, email Volunteer Coordinator May Saxton at [OCHistVolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:OCHistVolunteers@gmail.com).

## Board briefs

From the February meeting of the  
OCHS Board of Directors

- Society Board Retreat set for Saturday, March 22, 8:00 AM-12:00 PM. be presented at the 60th anniversary reception later this year.
- With the blessing of its namesake, the Historical Society has established the "Frank S. Walker, Jr. Historic Preservation Award," to
- The Society will also host the "Orange County History Forum" later in 2025 as a part of its 60th anniversary commemoration.



## Germanna Archaeology is hiring!

Nine positions for coming season available

- [Indigenous History Research Assistant \(Part-time/16 weeks\)](#)
- [Grant-funded Researcher - African American History and Community Engagement \(Part-time/16 weeks\)](#)
- [Grant-funded Assistant Site Supervisor \(Full-time/1 year\)](#)
- [Grant-funded Archaeology Technicians \(Full-time/9 months\)](#)
- [Archaeology Field Internships \(Full-time/12 weeks\)](#)

Click each position title above to see a full job description and to learn how to apply. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Eric Larsen at [elarsen@germanna.org](mailto:elarsen@germanna.org).

# Black businessmen during the early 20th Century

By Ray Ezell

It is uncommon to find abundant, detailed records of early Black-owned businesses in rural Virginia. But, businesses under Black ownership are listed in several volumes of the *Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer* for 1906, 1911, and 1917. The Orange County entries for those years reveal that Blacks were involved in a significant mixture of retail, agricultural, and professional pursuits throughout the county. The Historical Society would be interested in any additional information you may have on any of these businessmen. Contact Ray Ezell at [rayezell\\_2000@yahoo.com](mailto:rayezell_2000@yahoo.com) if you have any insights to share.

**Editor's Note:** Because of space issues in this edition of the Orange Oracle, we will not be publishing 50 Years Ago- Page 1 of the Orange County Review this month. Suffice it to say that our local weekly newspaper revealed no earth-shattering news items for March of 1975, other than the usual squabbles about the subdivision ordinance.

Name	Business	Location
<b>1906<sup>1</sup></b>		
Henry C Jefferson	Blacksmith/Wheelwright	Gordonsville
N.J. Walker	Broom Manufacturer	Gordonsville
Zachariah Lewis	Carpenter/Builder	Gordonsville
George Washington	Chair Cleaner	Gordonsville
N.J. Walker & Co.	Grocer	Gordonsville
Marshall Willis	Grocer & Saloon	Orange
Jno. Bowles	Meat Market	Gordonsville
Jefferson Wharton	Meat Market	Orange
Henry Cobb	Physician	Gordonsville
C.C. Taylor	Shoemaker	Gordonsville
Eddie Banks	Teacher	Albano
James Ellis	Farmer	Ahala
Ned Johnson	Farmer	Ahala
<b>1911<sup>2</sup></b>		
Benjamin F. Bowler	Barber	Orange (Levy Building)
W.H. Burrus	Blacksmith/Wheelwright	Special
Travis Daniel	Blacksmith/Wheelwright	Thorn Hill
Andrew Jackson	Blacksmith/Wheelwright	Gordonsville
Henry C. Jefferson	Blacksmith/Wheelwright	Gordonsville
M.B. Wright	Blacksmith/Wheelwright	Unionville
R.W. Staff	Butcher/Meat Market	Orange
Jefferson Wharton	Butcher/Meat Market	Orange
Marshall Willis, Jr	Butcher/Meat Market	Orange
Zachariah Lewis	Carpenter/Builder	Gordonsville
N.J. Walker	Carpenter/Builder	Gordonsville
Peter C. Christian	Grocer	Gordonsville
Edward C. Johnson	Grocer	Gordonsville
Marshall Willis	Grocer	Orange
Henry P. Cobb	Physician	Gordonsville
<b>1917<sup>3</sup></b>		
Benjamin F. Bowler	Barber	Orange
I.A. Jackson	Physician	Orange
D.H. Banks	Farmer	Albano
Oscar Gordon	Farmer	Albano
Ed Lewis	Farmer	Albano
Tiny Palmer	Farmer	Albano
Hiram Strother	Farmer	Albano
Fred Arrington	Farmer	Barboursville
Gordon Jackson	Farmer	Daniel
Jake Jackson	Farmer	Daniel
Auston White	Farmer	Daniel
Jno. White	Farmer	Daniel
J.F. Willis	Farmer	Daniel
Harrison Ellis	Farmer	Lahore RFD-1

<sup>1</sup> *Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer, 1906.* Hill Directory Company, Inc., Richmond, VA (1906)

<sup>2</sup> *Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer, 1911.* Hill Directory Company, Inc., Richmond, VA (1911)

<sup>3</sup> *Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer, 1917.* Hill Directory Company, Inc., Richmond, VA (1916)

## Membership

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