

Orange County Historical Society



Annual Member Meeting

January 28, 2024

President's Desk... -- Ray Ezell

Hello Members and Friends, 2023 was a busy and productive year that reached numerous successful milestones that all of us can be proud of. Below I have summarized a handful of the most notable 2023 achievements. These are:

- We dedicated the Sandra and William H. Speiden Auditorium at our Research Center which provides an upgraded and pleasing atmosphere for viewing in-person programs as well as needed shelving and cabinets. Many people are commended for completing this project, foremost Bill Speiden.
- New audio/visual technology has been installed in our auditorium to record and broadcast live programs to reach our community in the comfort of their own homes.
- Our flagship publications (the **Record** and **Orange Oracle**) and video presentations on History-to-Go continue to demonstrate our devotion to strong academic research blended with appealing story to present our community's history to others.
- We assisted the Orange County African American Historical Society to clean up the Little Petersburg Cemetery.
- We expanded our cooperation with county teachers by conducting a history bus tour for new teachers.
- We installed a new Marquis de Lafayette interpretive marker on the Society's front lawn, highlighting this significant episode in county history.
- We partnered with the Orange County Geographic Information Services (GIS) office to provide four late 19th-early 20th century online map overlays of the towns of Gordonsville and Orange on aerial photography to aid research.
- We partnered with the Orange County Court Clerk's office to facilitate electronic access for our staff to county land deeds and wills to support research.
- We began a collaborative effort with the County Tourism office, James Madison Museum, Montpelier, and local DAR/SAR chapters

to plan for local VA250 commemoration of the Revolutionary War, which will be integrated into the statewide celebration of this milestone period in the founding of this nation.

- Lastly, but certainly not least, the Board provided our staff with a much needed salary increase for the important work that they do for the Society.

The beginning of 2024 kicked off with the launch of our redesigned website (at the same web address, www.orangecovahist.org) which will provide an enhanced user experience and expanded online repository for research materials and past publications.

I want to especially thank our Society volunteers for their time and energy, our engaged Board of Directors for their leadership, as well as our devoted staff (Jean McGann, Jayne Blair, and Ruth Mallory Long) without whom much work could not be conducted, as they continue to be the inviting face of the Society to the general public.

This coming year marks the 59th year since our Society was organized, and we will continue to successfully tell the stories of Orange County to our community. I'd like to challenge each of you today to get involved—use your enthusiasm to take ownership of a part of the work of this society. **Find your niche!!** Areas that you can help in are: Events Planning, Growing Our Membership, Fundraising, Recruiting Volunteers, Planning Programs, Digitizing Collections, Contributing to the Newsletter/Oracle, Conducting Local Research, Beautification of our Facility, Board of Directors Service, or Organizing Archival Collections. Many hands makes lighter work. If this interests you, **please reach out directly to me at rayezell_2000@yahoo.com.**

Treasurer's Report-James Luther

We greatly appreciate the continuing support of our members and other donors, as well as the town and county for their re-occurring grants. All of these contributors allows us to operate our facility and meet operating expenses.

Membership dues and additional donations in 2023 totaled \$66,870.22. Our income from all sources in 2023 was \$74,009.46, and our expenses were \$90,963.09. We began 2024 with \$10,739.49 in our checking accounts, in addition to our investment assets of over \$345,000. Our investments are down somewhat over the past year, but we expect them to recover with the market over time. We continue to have a solid financial footing from which to continue serving the community through our programs, research efforts, and publications.

The following are some of 2023's financial changes and accomplishments: changed our Quickbooks service to their web based platform; employed Main Street Accounting Services to prepare all government tax filings and returns; and eliminated the service contract for an infrequently used copy machine and reconfigured our Comcast service resulting in significant savings. By vote of the Board, we also established an operating account within our Edward Jones account for payment of normal bills during low donation times.

Committee Reports

Building and Grounds – Patrick Colby

A number of tasks have been completed and/or coordinated by the Building and Grounds Committee. Highlights include:

- Repaired and reinstalled exterior columns at west entrance
- General maintenance/repairs (e.g., replaced side door deadbolts, replaced alarm system land line with cell phone-based service, new coat rack, miscellaneous lawn care)
- Supervised exterior painting of the building
- Coordinated fall outdoor cleanup
- Coordinated/performed various non-construction tasks related to Speiden Auditorium project

Collections – Ann Miller

We are in the process of reorganizing some our research collections storage, including relocating file cabinets to better accommodate our family history

and historical files. A new research work/storage area has been set up at the rear of the remodeled auditorium, and planning work for expanding capacity in the existing storage area/mechanical room has begun. Book and research collections inventories are being updated as items are reorganized. Major in-progress work includes the organization of the extensive Duff Green photographic negative collection.

Library – Ann Miller

In consultation with staff, some slight reorganizing of our library books has been completed, and the new locations have been entered in our library inventory and finding aids. In addition, a number of new books have been acquired, largely through donations, including; land records (and patents), genealogical compilations, abstracts of county records, county and regional historical information, and Black history. New shelving was added to the Research Center giving additional room for our present volumes, as well as for expansion of our book collections.

Primary book groups for our library collections include: family histories, historical and genealogical resources, early explorations and settlement, regional and county histories (including local historical material), county records, military history, church and religious histories, Black History, governmental and legal information, periodicals, genealogical/historical magazine sets, and multi-volume compilations. The Black history shelves contain books from both the OCHS and the Orange County African American Historical Society collections.

Education – Rod Hawkins

During 2023, the Education committee continued to support history teachers in the Orange County schools in their quest to teach a comprehensive history of the United States supported by the richness of local history.

Free historical society membership is available for history teachers in grades 4-12, giving them access to all programs and resources offered by the society. Monthly emails are sent to history teachers highlighting an Educator Resource that can be found on the Society website.

Society members have spoken to middle school students about the history of their school, one room schoolhouses in Orange County, various topics during Black History month, and conducted a walking tour of the Town of Orange.

During New Teacher Institute for the current year, Society members narrated a bus tour for all new teachers, noting areas and items of local historical significance in the county. During Staff Convocation, OCHS was available to share resources for local history with school staff.

On the Society website, numerous Educator Resources are provided by historical periods, and the inventory is continually expanded. Teachers are also invited to submit questions and/or topics to be researched by the Education Committee.

The Education committee also hosted approximately 20 teachers for in-service training in the Sandra and William H. Speiden auditorium on how to use the Society website. Board member Jennifer Conley showed teachers areas that could supplement their lessons and planning, as well as History-to-Go video clips.

The committee also coordinated with the American Friends of Lafayette and Orange County public schools to offer 4th-5th graders the opportunity to enter the 2024 Lafayette Essay contest to learn more about the impact of Lafayette on American history.

The committee welcomes additional suggestions of ways to support our local teachers.

Outreach – Mark Hoerath

During 2023 the Outreach Committee completed two projects; a comprehensive online Membership Survey and Speiden Auditorium Audiovisual Support and Streaming projects. In addition, twelve new episodes of History-to-Go were compiled, edited and uploaded to the Historical Society's YouTube channel.

Membership Survey. Members were invited to complete a survey of their thoughts on priorities and future goals of the Historical Society. The results

will be considered by staff and board members for daily planning, strategic planning, and for orienting new board members.

The top five responses gathered from the survey were:

- Improve accessibility by digitizing collections
- Offer informative presentations to the public
- Support historic preservation efforts in the community
- Improve social media and web presence
- Research early African American communities

Speiden Auditorium AV and Streaming. Milestones completed for this project include: Purchase and installation of new A/V streaming equipment, including: donated camera and lights, presentation flat screen monitor, presentation laptop, above-ceiling cables, presentation backdrop with new logo, and new podium. An operator training manual was produced and training with volunteers was conducted on how to successfully stream programs was conducted. All equipment expenditures were within budget, and several programs have been successfully live streamed and recorded using this new capability.

In the coming year, the Committee will develop a marketing plan and enact as necessary, to include methods to publicize Society programs, initiatives, and products. A review of the Society website will be also be undertaken, and the committee will continue to support the **Oracle** and History-to-Go YouTube channel as needed.

Membership – Mike Saxton

As of 11 January 2024, we have 315 active members compared to 325 in 2023 and 189 in 2022. After a huge increase of 136 new members last year, we were concerned that membership might drop off substantially, but we have basically remained stable.

We are continuing our third academic year of free Educator memberships in support of Orange County history and social studies teachers. We are the only county in the area offering free Educator support in this manner.

There has been interest in forming small Special Interest Groups (SIGs) of members focusing on a topic where group members would more actively participate/contribute to discussions or research in the special interest area. Suggestions have been made around Genealogy, Civil War, Old Homes, Local History Book Club, African American and Church History special interest areas.

For 2024, we would like to start a Genealogy group to see how this would work. The group will focus on helping each other learn the basics of genealogy while applying it to Orange and surrounding county research. If you are interested, please email: mikesaxtonsr@gmail.com

Program – Ray Ezell

2023 was a full year for programs/picnics, held on Sunday afternoons with many being held at off-site venues to appeal to a broad cross-section of our members and the community. Off-site programs included: Knights of the Golden Horseshoe, Montpelier Archaeology, History of Clore Furniture, Mayhurst Estate, Grymes School 75th Anniversary, Woodley Estate, and Bloomsbury Manor. We returned to our auditorium, remodeled in honor of Sandra and William H. Speiden, for presentations on the APVA Revolving Fund and Berry Hill house rehabilitation. All programs were well attended, and we will continue offering programs on Sunday afternoons to appeal to a wide audience. The 2024 program schedule has been set, so pay attention to program announcements in future editions of the **Oracle**, on our Facebook page, and by email.

Publications -- Lynne G. Lewis

The Publications Committee was very active during 2023, producing the usual two print editions of our newsletter, **Record**, sending 12 issues of the **Orange Oracle** to our members and educators, and welcoming the 2nd edition of an important book.

In February, we were delighted to announce the publication of Garland Tyree's, **Old Blue Run Baptist Church, Constituted December 4, 1769,: The First One Hundred Years**. Originally published in 1985 as a paperback, this second edition is hardcover, indexed, and includes an eight-page pictorial

insert. Mr. Tyree's 96-page book is a thorough history of the early Baptists in Orange and surrounding counties, as well as of the Blue Run Baptist Church itself.

In a slight departure from our usual procedure, we entered a cooperative agreement with Frank S. Walker, Jr., our highly regarded Orange County historian. He published the softcover book, **Rural Virginia Reflections**, containing sketches of life and work on a farm in the northern piedmont of Virginia, ca. 1930 – 1980. Sold by subscription only, the Society facilitated this process. If you did not get a copy of this delightful book, there is one available for on-site reading at the Research Center.

Finally, as the year ended, several projects were being finalized, including Ann L. Miller's transcription of **The Register of Free Blacks for Orange County, Virginia (1803—1850)**. The forthcoming book represents the 147 register entries, transcribed and indexed, covering the years from 1803 to mid-1850 and includes an informative introduction to the material. We hope to have this in print in the next few weeks.

Research – Ray Ezell

Several areas of research were initiated or expanded in 2023. These included; history of newspaper publishing in Orange County, free and enslaved craftsmen in Orange County, evolution of commercial businesses in downtown Gordonsville, and continued refinement of commercial genealogy in downtown Orange.

The Mill Research group some progress in 2023, focusing primarily on documents research and mentions of Orange County mills in local and regional newspapers to place them in proper historical context. Results of some of these research projects will be reported in the Oracle and/or Record in future editions.

Teaser: members should pay attention to a forthcoming announcement initiating a major new research project that will require a significant investment of time and energy from volunteers to complete. This may be your opportunity to assist the Society in an important county wide research initiative.

Volunteer Support – May Saxton

Our monthly “Call for Volunteers” has been well received this year. Volunteers have been recruited for a variety of roles including operating audio visual equipment for historical society programs, joining the Outreach Committee, organizing postcards, helping with a community scanning event, scanning family files, organizational records, and obituaries. In addition to countless volunteer hours offered by board members and some by staff members, over 225 volunteer hours have been logged by society members as compared to 125 hours in 2022. Many thanks to these individuals who have given of their time to benefit our society during 2023 including:

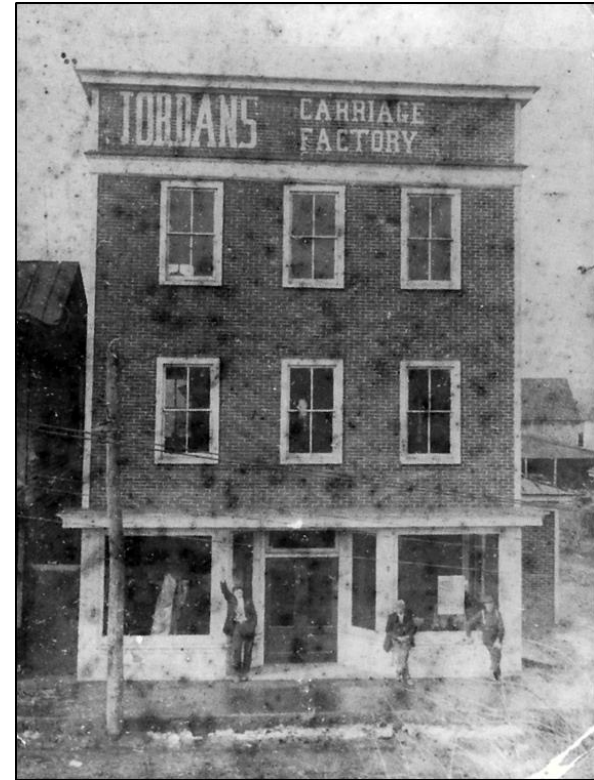
Carla Passarello (before joining the Board), Laura Bray, Patrick McAloon, Lynne Lewis, Carolyn Walker, Ethan (student intern), and several members of the Woman’s Club.

Special thanks to Patty Parmer for her amazing contribution of approximately 107 hours of work of scanning family files and organizational materials! Many thanks to Jayne Blair for coordinating our volunteers on-site at the research center. Be sure to watch the “Oracle” for 2024 volunteer opportunities!

Sandra and William H. Speiden Auditorium Committee—Bill Speiden

The auditorium renovation project was completed in 2023 and included installation of custom-made shelving and repairs to the leaky roof gutter and insulation in the south and west walls. Insulation of these walls allow us to not relying on a low-functioning passive solar system, saving energy costs, provide a "work" room for storing and organizing research materials, make a more attractive auditorium, and provides good integration with our

new A/V center. A display case made from a walnut tree Bill felled in 1993 honors Sandra Speiden's many-faceted contributions to the knowledge of Native American history, both in Orange County and statewide.



Jordan’s Carriage Works, Gordonsville, Virginia (ca. 1916)



Orange County Historical Society, Inc.

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Founded in 1965, then incorporated in 1966, the Orange County Historical Society, Inc. is a research, archival, and educational organization dedicated to the discovery, preservation, and dissemination of the history of the people, places, organizations, and events of Orange County, Virginia, and the surrounding area.