

NEWS - NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

August 2017

September Program

'A History of Goshen, Virginia'

On September 10, the Rockbridge Historical Society will sponsor another program in its series about the county's smaller communities. Previous talks have featured House Mountain, Denmark, Natural Bridge Station and Collierstown. Next up is a look at the western-most portion of Rockbridge: Goshen. At 2:30 PM, in the sanctuary of Goshen Baptist Church, Anne McClung will return to the RHS podium after her packed-house presentation on Alone Mill last year. Her narrated slideshow on the history of Goshen will include both archival and aerial photography.



Mr. and Mrs. A.D. Bell of Goshen, circa 1900 (Photo courtesy of Ellen Cameron Gray).

Anne is a retired Goshen librarian with a longstanding passion for local history, and she significantly expanded the Goshen Library's local history collection. Because of Goshen's intriguing, diversified, yet intertwined history of the railroad, resort hotels, and iron furnaces, the local history collection was and is well utilized by historians and researchers from all over the country. Anne says, "It is a privilege for me to give this presentation because Goshen and Goshen Pass have been an intricate and very special part of my entire life."

Although agriculture was the basis for settling the area, what really put Goshen on the map was the combination of the railroad, local iron ore, and the healing springs. In its heyday, Goshen had a population of 2,000, was home to several productive iron furnaces, and boasted its own newspaper, "The Goshen Blade." Visitors arrived at first by stagecoach and later by rail to stay at popular resort hotels in the area. Then came the Goshen Land and Improvement Company, comprised of street-savvy capitalists with experience in business, law, real estate development, and industry: they aimed to make Goshen the "Pittsburgh of the South." Goshen became a boom town for a while, but the exaggerated plans for its industrial growth never came to fruition.

The 1800s had witnessed considerable economic growth in the United States, fueled by industrialization, railroad expansion and other improved means of transportation and foreign investment. But toward the end of the century times became tight – very tight. A severe financial crisis known as "the Panic of 1893" was felt throughout the country, the county, and the little town of Goshen. Over the span of a few years the boom came and went, leaving the town of Goshen a quiet, rural haven in an ever growing world.

Goshen has been left with a remarkable history and just a few structures from olden times. Today its population is about 400 persons who rely chiefly on agriculture and a few small industries for employment. Kathleen Kilpatrick, director of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, says, "It's no secret that the strongest communities are not the cookie-cutter communities and subdivisions, but places like Goshen that have a sense of character and identity and connectedness to their past."



The presentation is free and open to the public, with refreshments and fellowship to follow. Parking is available outside the church, but please plan to arrive early to reserve a seat, given the growing audiences for this series.

Program at a Glance

Theme: Goshen

Date: Sunday, September 10

Time: 2:30 p.m., reception to follow

Location: Goshen Baptist Church

From the RHS Executive Director

Homecomings

Labor Day often feels like a midpoint in the rhythms of “Homecomings.” Picnics and backyard barbeques often grace family reunions during summer travel, while schools and fall football games beckon as the seasons turn.

Sometimes these gatherings are annual, honored by the reinforcement of ritual. Sometimes they witness notable landmarks: 50th class reunions, *bar mitzvahs*, and weddings. Sometimes, they note an institutional, even spiritual reach over time (to recognize just two churches who have recently supported RHS efforts, First Baptist Church and Collierstown Presbyterian Church will celebrate their 150th and 175th anniversaries, respectively, in September). Sometimes residents return home to raise families, or retire.

In August, RHS welcomed the reunion visit of the Williams-Gilmore family, whose local genealogies go back into the mid-18th Century. Born into slavery in 1853, Andrew Gilmore continued to live in Rockbridge after Emancipation, while his descendants moved westward into Bath County, the Alleghenies, and Ohio. A call from a descendent (and longtime RHS member) sparked a gathering that grew to more than 50 people and four generations. We enjoyed a lively hour browsing Campbell House displays, maps, and resources, before taking a themed tour of our historic pavers in downtown Lexington. Drawing folks from across seven states – whether another return to Rockbridge, or a youngster’s first visit – the gathering both affirmed and extended the knowledge and networks of family, community, and our Society.

It also resulted in the thoughtful gift of some family papers, emphasizing the degree to which local history organizations like RHS depend not only on the homecomings of people, but of archives: photographs, heirlooms, oral histories, the materials that make our public programs and educational outreach both tangible and sustainable.

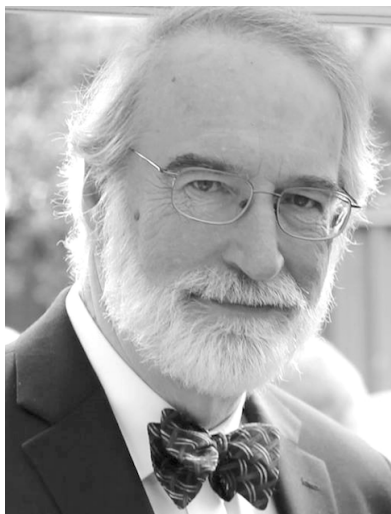
Colored by both lore and love, living connections and long legacy, homecomings connect people and place in profound ways. The community-centered focus of many of our recent programs has demonstrated that sort of pull. We’ve been excited to see neighbors newly drawn into our fold, as well as the travel of family members from afar, eager to learn more about their familiar sites and forebears while sharing their own materials in turn.

For our part, we hope to continue to demonstrate how societies like RHS – along with those other archives from schools or churches where your families broadly gather from further afield – help preserve a sense of home, help shape how, and why, we travel through the past, to come there anew.

We hope to see you at our events this fall, whether Rockbridge still proves home, or an opportune spur for a homecoming.

— Eric Wilson

Volunteer Profile: Richard Lynn



Richard Lynn is the volunteer who manages the database of RHS members, contributors, and friends with records of dues and donations. Richard moved here with his wife, Ann, three years ago following a career as a lawyer, law professor, and law school dean. After serving as dean at two law schools (Pepperdine in California and John Marshall in Georgia), he wryly notes that “power corrupts and being a law school dean corrupts absolutely.”

The Lynns frequently visited Lexington over the years for its beauty and history; their oldest daughter, Alice Bruno, lives here with her husband, Chris, and their two daughters.

Richard lives in the house on South Main Street built in 1885 by Colonel William T. Poague, a truly heroic artillery commander in the Civil War. Col. Poague was a civic leader, legislator, Presbyterian elder, and VMI's Treasurer for almost 30 years. Richard recently delivered a well-received paper on Col. Poague to the Rockbridge Civil War Roundtable.

Upcoming RHS Events

Rockbridge Community Festival, Saturday, August 26, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. Come show your support for the RHS mission, enjoy the displays and sales at our Main Street booth and Campbell House, even try your hand as a volunteer!

Apple Days, Saturday, October 21. This year, RHS will join in the festivities hosted by Stonewall Jackson House as it expands its range of historical, artistic, performative and horticultural activities into a closed-off Washington Street. In addition to showcasing its own new Healing Garden, RHS is working to host costumed interpreters including “The Ladies of the Union,” who will demonstrate period domestic crafts, including quilting, textile handiwork, and the use of an authentic, early chain-stitch single-thread machine, famously developed by James Gibbs of Raphine.

MOVIE NIGHT, Tuesday, September 26, 7 p.m. The film “Rosenwald” documents the extraordinary role of the Rosenwald Fund in establishing schools for African-American students across the country; it provided seed money for the original Lylburn Downing School that opened here in 1927. The screening in the cafeteria of Lylburn Downing Middle School will be co-sponsored by the Historic Lexington Foundation, Preservation Virginia, and RHS. Look for more details to follow.

From the RHS President Progress

Since our last “News-Notes,” your Society produced another fine presentation, “Collierstown: Rockbridge’s Gateway to the West,” thanks to Horace Douty and the Effinger Fire Department. Upwards of 250 folks enjoyed Horace’s delivery.

As we look forward to the fall, we are gearing up for the Community Festival in late August, a number of events with local partners, our public program on September 10th titled “The History of Goshen,” and the buildup to our second annual Rockbridge History Bee to be held in Buena Vista in February of 2018.

As another landmark, RHS published and then mailed out to all members the latest volume of the “RHS Proceedings.” Volunteers Marian and David Novak, with help from Rich Hubbard and Eric Wilson, were the primary editors and designers of this wonderful book, the fourteenth such volume since our founding in 1939. We hope you will enjoy this local treasure, with our thanks for your continued support.

Lastly, upon the Board’s adoption of a formal endowment policy, it expects to earmark \$25,000 to serve as an initial endowment for the future security of the Society. We are excited to annually and substantially grow this amount through your support, and hope you will help us to recruit others who feel our mission is worthy of perpetuating for the ages.

—*Stephen D. Beck*

Volunteer Profile: Peter Simpson



Peter Simpson was elected to the RHS Board in 2016 and serves as a member of its property committee.

Peter was born in Rockbridge County and attended public schools, graduating from RCHS in 1994. He earned a B.A. in Studio Art from Davidson College in 1998. For the last 18 years Peter has enjoyed working as a preservation carpenter on many of the historic buildings in the county.

He was recently hired into the newly created position of Studio Art Technician at W&L. The son of Pamela and Henry Simpson, Peter has a strong interest in local vernacular architecture and crafts and hopes to continue the legacy of his mother’s longstanding commitments to and leadership in RHS.

Peter and his wife, Laura, a Family Nurse Practitioner with the Maury River Family Practice in Glasgow, have two children, Henry and Helen. They reside in the Kerrs Creek district.

Rockbridge Historical Society

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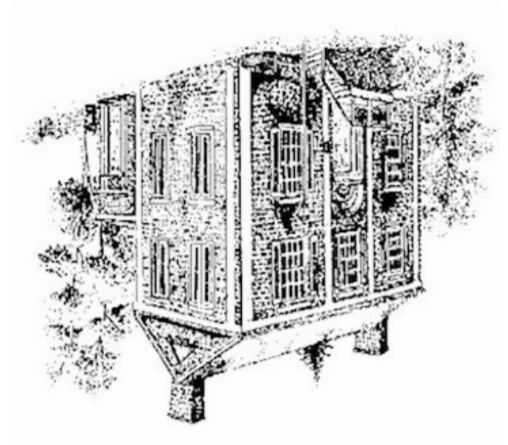
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