

# NEWS - NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

December 2016

## *December Program*

### **Lynn talks on ‘Beyond the Boom: Histories of Buena Vista’**

The Society’s final program of the year will feature a presentation on the history of Buena Vista, preceded by a brief Annual Meeting of the membership and followed by a holiday-themed reception with seasonal displays, Buena Vista artifacts, and handcrafted ornaments featuring Buena Vista churches. The program is free and open to the public.

Over the past century and a half, Buena Vista has taken many forms, from the early settlements of “Green Forest” to an industrial powerhouse at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, followed by its evolution after the “Boom” into a commercial and geographical crossroads distinguished by its educational institutions.

#### **Program at a Glance**

**Theme:** Histories of Buena Vista

**Date:** Sunday, December 11

**Time:** 2:00 p.m., reception to follow

**Location:** American Legion Hall,  
1953 Magnolia Ave, BV

The featured speaker, Francis W. Lynn, is a native of Buena Vista well known locally as an influential educator and historian. Mr. Lynn will engage in conversational exchanges with and questions from Dr. Horace Douty, Pastor of Oxford Presbyterian Church, who will share some of his own reflections on Buena Vista drawn from his 2008 book of essays that canvass Rockbridge history in “History Lessons from a County Church.”

Lynn notes, “I’m frequently asked to talk about the history of Buena Vista, which most often translates into ‘talk about the Boom.’ While much has been written about those three years in the 1890s, little has been asked about the city’s other 130-plus years. With Horace Douty as moderator and input from the audience, this program should provide some background to the Boom’s crucial kickstart. But I believe that what transpired after the ‘Bust’ embodies the true character of Buena Vista’s people.”

With the support of a slide show featuring historic photographs and a range of the city’s cultural institutions, Lynn’s remarks will reflect his favored theme, “Buena Vista is a place where people *Pray Hard, Study Hard, Work Hard, and Play Hard.*”

Born and reared in Buena Vista, Francis Lynn is a 1946 graduate of Parry McCluer High School and a 1950 graduate of Washington and Lee University. He served in the United States Air Force from 1950-1954, taught for ten years at PMHS, then served for nearly 25 years as an instructional supervisor for Prince William County Public Schools. In 1989, he joined the Buena Vista History Committee to prepare for the city’s 1992 centennial. With the encouragement of the Committee, as well as his wife, he researched and wrote “Buena Vista: The Bud Not Yet Blossomed,” the book whose proceeds were instrumental in funding the centennial celebrations.

That experience continues to fuel Mr. Lynn’s passion for local history, as does his service since 1997 as historian for the Paxton House Historical Society. In a reflection that may speak to many RHS supporters, he comments, “My required high school and college history courses had never inspired me, with English and foreign languages more to my liking. But in delving into local history, I began to discover a lot about my community, my family, and myself. If I were younger, I would start a crusade to make local history a Virginia graduation requirement!”

---

### ***Election to be held at Annual Meeting on December 11***

The Society’s Nominating Committee proposes the following slate of officers to serve for two-year terms: President, Stephen D. Beck; Vice President, Mary Harvey-Halseth; Vice President for Property, David Stull; Treasurer, Richard Hubbard; Secretary, Paul Barron. In addition, Seth McCormick-Goodhart is nominated as Trustee. All RHS members present at the program on December 11 will have the opportunity to vote.

---

## *Collections Spotlight:*

### **Documenting the South River Lumber Company**

September was a special month for the Rockbridge Historical Society. In addition to the memorable program on Alone Mill given by Anne McClung, we received a valuable set of blueprints and drawings detailing the plant and equipment of the historic South River Lumber Company in Cornwall.

Some fifteen documents were donated to the Society by Mr. Bobby Berkstresser, a significant economic force in Rockbridge County and a supporter of RHS. Mr. Berkstresser has a group of friends who are always on the lookout on his behalf for old photographs of Rockbridge people, places, and things. Last spring, a friend came across these South River documents and Bobby jumped on them right away for the Society. The drawings date from 1901 through 1916. Some of the plans are for complete buildings, others for ovens for drying lumber or machinery to process it. The materials are now in our inventory of historical documents and have found their home in the Special Collections section of Washington and Lee University's Leyburn Library.



In another unique gift to RHS, Mr. Berkstresser assembled several boxes of journals, ledgers, and ephemera from the country store his family has operated for years in Vesuvius. As our Collections Committee begins to evaluate individual items and consider their conservation needs, the materials appear to provide another valuable link to the economic history of the county; in a similar vein, shortly before our 2014 Anniversary Gala at the R.E. Lee Hotel, RHS received a trunk full of extensive

commercial records and personal papers chronicling the lives and Depression-era struggles of the hotel and its string of local gas stations.

All of these gifts not only add to RHS archives, but can also fuel the types of research featured in our March 2015 program on "History Through Accounting," when W&L faculty and students shared their own discoveries that drew on such often-overlooked resources to illuminate local history. Chaired by Margaret Skovira, with support from Tom Camden and Seth McCormick-Goodhart (fellow RHS Board members and W&L Special Collections staff), our collections team has advanced with notable energy this past year, extending the web and interconnections of our holdings.

We applaud Bobby Berkstresser for recognizing the value of these papers and encourage others to consider your own family and professional records to see how you might support the Society's commitments to historic preservation.

*-- Stephen D. Beck, RHS President*



Above photographs of workmen and and the lumber company site were provided by Washington and Lee University's Special Collections.

# The Rockbridge History Bee Takes Off!

The Rockbridge History Bee is coming: building on their preparation this summer and fall, 20 area high school students have registered to compete and show their command of local history above and beyond their school curricula.



Students from Rockbridge County and Parry McCluer High Schools as well as homeschooled students will compete individually in a new contest designed by the Rockbridge Historical Society. As in a traditional spelling bee, participants will answer a series of progressively more difficult questions; all will be drawn from the RHS-published history book, “Remarkable Rockbridge,” by Charles Bodie, and set in multiple-choice format. Cash awards of \$1500, \$750, and \$500 for top placings have clearly helped to drive student interest, as have the encouragement and support of school faculty, librarians, and administrators.

RHS volunteers and Board members have been vital in preparing and sorting questions, with community leaders, including local and state elected officials, lending their support. This exciting new venture in Rockbridge education is made possible through sponsorships from CornerStone Bank, Sunrise Rotary Club, the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation and the Washington and Lee Community Grants Program. The competition will take place in Kendal at Lexington’s Anderson Hall on December 3, beginning at 10:00 a.m.

Audience members can test their own knowledge of Rockbridge History – silently, with those prizes on the line! — while the next generation of Rockbridge citizens demonstrate their own preparation. Or you can test yourself with some sample questions as shown below.

— Eric Wilson, RHS Executive Director

- 1. In 1739, who received from King George II a land grant of 92,100 acres, the core of what would become Rockbridge County?** A. Sir John McDowell B. Governor Gooch C. Benjamin Borden D. None of the above
- 2. According to the 1860 census in Rockbridge County, what percentage of the population were slaves?** A. 12% B. 23% C. 37% D. 52%
- 3. Who served as an artillery general under Robert E. Lee and as Rector at the Episcopal church that would eventually bear Lee's name?** A. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson B. William N. Pendleton C. George Washington Custis Lee D. George C. Marshall
- 4. The Reconstruction Era of the 1870s best refers to the** A. Reinforcement of Federal Government in Southern States B. Virginia’s state-level initiatives to re-structure the post-War economy C. Local Rockbridge efforts to rebuild destroyed churches and schools D. Investments in the Valley Turnpike
- 5. Who is the author of Remarkable Rockbridge?** A. Charles Dickens B. Charles Manson C. Charles Bodie D. Charles Chaplin

## Virginia World War I and World War II Commemoration Commission Tribute to Veterans

### *"Dawn of Infamy: America Goes to War"*

Tribute to Veterans and Live-Streaming Viewing Party

December 8, 9:30-11:30 AM, Gillis Theater, Center for Leadership and Ethics, VMI

*Sponsored by the George C. Marshall Foundation and the Lexington Commemoration Committee*

This statewide event features the official kickoff of a series of commemorative programs to recognize the histories and service of Virginians involved in the First and Second World Wars. The live-streamed event from Richmond on December 8 will include an honor parade of WW II veterans, remarks by dignitaries, and a keynote address from Pulitzer-Prize-winning military historian Rick Atkinson.

More information may be found at [viriniaworldwarII.org/wwII-2016-tribute](http://viriniaworldwarII.org/wwII-2016-tribute).

# Rockbridge Historical Society

## Board Members and Officers

President: Stephen D. Beck  
Vice President: Jane L. Brooke  
VP for Property: David Stull  
Treasury/Finance: Richard Hubbard  
Secretary & Educational  
Outreach: Mary Harvey-Halseth  
Programs: Reed Belden  
Development: Neely Young  
Membership: Dick Rathmell  
Collections: Margaret Skovira  
At Large: Seth McCormick-Goodhart  
At Large: Peter Simpson

## Board Members Ex-officio

Gardens: John & Jeanette Matchette  
Archives: Tom Camden

## Trustees

David Coffey  
Peggy Webster Hays  
Dick Rathmell

**Executive Director** Eric Wilson

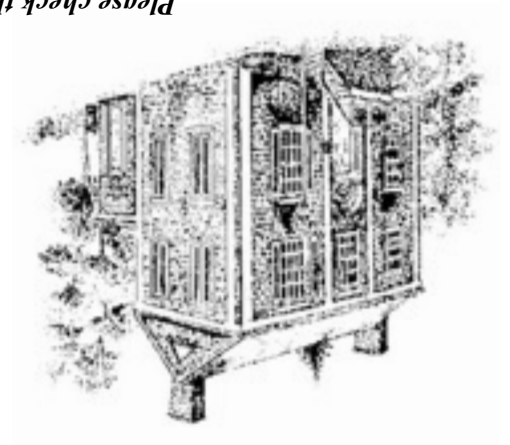
**Newsletter** Sally Nunneley

**Telephone:** 540-464-1058

**Email:** [rochist@hotmail.com](mailto:rochist@hotmail.com)

**Website:** [www.rockhist.org](http://www.rockhist.org)

*Please check the mailing label for your current Membership Date  
Members are asked to renew for 2017; donors, please consider adding membership!*



Campbell House  
Washington & Randolph Streets  
P.O. Drawer 1409  
Lexington, Virginia 24450-1409

**ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
EST. 1939

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PERMIT #25  
LEXINGTON, VA  
24450