

NEWS - NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

May 2016

May Program: 'The C&O Railroad in Rockbridge'



Michael Miley photograph of the East Lexington rail yard, across the Maury River from Jordan's Point. (Photo from RHS Collections)

The next RHS program will be presented by Thomas W. Dixon, Jr., founder of the C&O Historical Society. Mr. Dixon's presentation will be sure to reward rail enthusiasts and fans of historic photographs. But more broadly, it will provide a portrait of how Rockbridge changed dramatically with the coming and passing of different railroad companies, and the commercial and social connections they enabled.

The program on the evening of Tuesday, May 17, will provide a timely lead-in for Saturday's grand opening of the Miller's House Museum with its displays related to transportation and industry at Jordan's Point; see the accompanying story for details on the museum event.

At a macro level, Mr. Dixon's talk will focus on the importance of railroad technology as it contributed to the

creation of modern times; at a regional level, on how that technology evolved and helped develop Virginia as we know it today; and on a local level, how railroads affected the development of modern commerce within the boundaries of Rockbridge County.

Mr. Dixon was born in Alderson, WV, and graduated from the University of West Virginia in 1969. He served in the U.S. Army until retiring as a Lt. Colonel in 1990. He then founded and operated TLC Publishing, which has produced 150 titles on railroad history, of which he authored or co-authored 30 on railroad history. In 1969, he founded the C&O Historical Society, and in 2008, achieved the long-term goal of establishing a museum and archive at the C&O Railway Heritage Center in Clifton Forge, VA. Until recently, he served as the Society's President, CEO and Chairman; Mr. Dixon now serves as the organization's Chief Historian and Publications Officer.

Program at a Glance

Theme: Railroad in Rockbridge

Date: Tuesday, May 17

Location: Old Courthouse,

2 S. Main Street, Lexington

Time: 7:00 p.m.

RHS joins Miller's House Museum grand opening at Jordan's Point

Saturday, May 21, will be an exciting day for Rockbridge history buffs, with the grand opening of the Miller's House Museum at Jordan's Point. Ten different organizations will participate to celebrate and enrich the museum's mission. RHS has both loaned artifacts and provided expertise to this new and independent enterprise. The museum – like RHS, a member of the Virginia Association of Museums – is dedicated to interpreting the industrial and transportation history of the Lexington area by celebrating the roads, rivers and rails that served a now extinct industrial complex on Jordan's Point, located at a loop in the Maury River at the northeast edge of the city. The Miller's House is the only structure remaining at this once vibrant area that was originally developed by John Jordan, who operated a furnace, a forge and a covered toll bridge that spanned the North (now Maury) River.

The area was served by the Great Wagon Road, which brought thousands of immigrants from further north to settle in Virginia, Tennessee and the Carolinas. Daniel Boone used this road many times. Commerce to the east was facilitated first

See Miller's House opening, Page 2

Miller's House opening

Continued from Page 1

by batteaux and then canal boats that provided access to markets in Richmond and beyond. The railroads came in the 1880s, replacing the canal going east and opening markets to the north through Staunton and Harrisonburg.

RHS will join the many preservation groups supporting the grand opening. RHS displays will feature its Lewis & Clark Discovery Trunk, historic artifacts and photographs, and an array of maps and publications for sale. Other participating groups include the National Park Service, the Historic Lexington Foundation, the Virginia Canals and Navigation Society, Paxton House, Friends of the Chessie Trail, the Civil War Roundtable, Boxerwood, the Lexington Visitors Center, and Main Street Lexington.

The festivities will feature old-time music, quilting, spinning, and a cobbler, along with island walking tours and children's games. In the house, a historic model railroad, representing Jordan's Point in the early 20th Century, will attract all ages. All events are free and start at 1:00 p.m. at Jordan's Point Park, northwest of the Maury River Bridge on Route 11. For more information, see millershousmuseum.org.



The newly restored Miller's House at Jordan's Point in Lexington. (Photo courtesy of museum president Dick Halseth)

Thanks to our supporters!

In the first two months of the 2016 campaign for the Annual Fund, generous contributions have helped us to reach some important benchmarks, even as we continue to broaden development opportunities. Your gifts and pledges are crucial to RHS operations and long-term goals. Your investment will sustain the ties of local history that we're very proud to preserve and promote.

— *Eric Wilson, Executive Director*

Book Review

'C&O Lexington Branch'

Those attending the RHS program on May 17 will also have a chance to browse through and purchase a copy of the just-published, lavishly illustrated Volume 13 in the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway History Series, "C&O Lexington Branch," by Alfred Kresse.

This sleek, 100-page book includes nearly 200 maps, drawings, period timetables and historic photographs, a number of them from RHS collections; concise introductions and rich captions chronicle the railway's evolving presence in Rockbridge.

After the C&O purchased the bankrupt Richmond & Allegheny line in 1890, a 21-mile branch was constructed from the James River along the North (Maury) River to Lexington. Kresse's impressive volume traces the county's transition from canal paths and turnpikes to rail; the financial struggles and takeovers of rival railroad companies; the growth of local depots and businesses; the challenges of the Depression; the rise of automobiles; and the 1969 ravaging floods from Hurricane Camille, followed by the recreational revival of the Chessie Trail.

Copies of the book can be purchased for \$25 at the RHS Program on May 17, or by calling Campbell House at 540-464-1058.

— *Eric Wilson*

Local History Events

Brownsburg Museum: "Grain into Gold: Milling and Distilling on the Dividing Waters." The new Exhibit will open May 14; regular hours will be Sat 10-4, Sun 1-4. Located on Route 252.

Civil War Roundtable, Lexington: "Southern Currency during the War Between the States." Speaker David Meisky, May 18, 7:00 p.m., Nichols Auditorium, VMI.

Paxton House, Buena Vista: An evening at the Elisha Paxton House, ca. 1831. Box Supper and entertainment: \$35. To make reservations, address e-mail to PaxtonHouseHistoricalSociety@gmail.com.

Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke: "A Portrait of George Washington: The Man, the Soldier, and the President." Through July 31. See taubmanmuseum.org.

Paintings of East Lexington

As attention turns to Jordan's Point with the anticipated opening of the Miller's House (see page 1), we have looked again at two paintings in the RHS collection, both of East Lexington as it appeared in the past. Both paintings show the historic covered bridge over the North (now Maury) River.

The covered bridge was built in 1835 and at one time enriched John Jordan, for whom the point is named, as he collected tolls from those who used the bridge. The original span was burned by confederate troops during Hunter's Raid in 1864; its replacements were destroyed twice by floods in 1870, and the final bridge, opened in 1872, was allowed to disintegrate during the 1930s after a new concrete and steel bridge was built. Efforts to preserve the disused bridge failed, and its remains were removed in the 1940s.

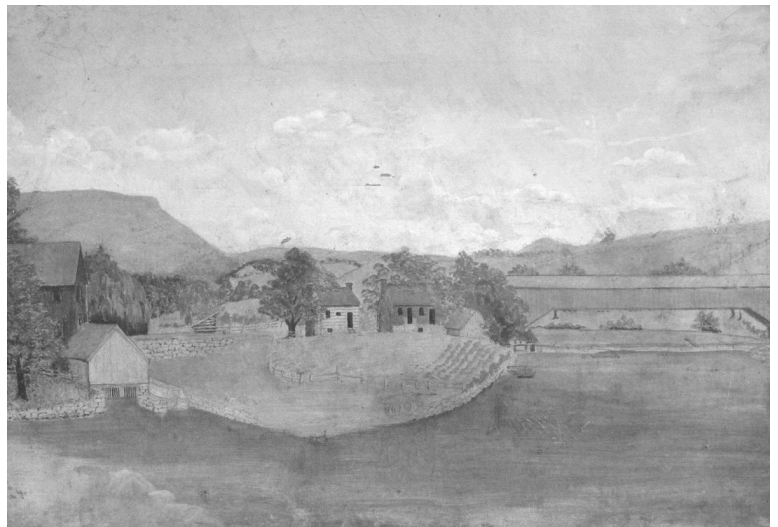
The first oil painting is unsigned and undated but has been attributed to James H. Waddell, a member of the family that owned the Campbell House (now RHS headquarters) after the Civil War. He was a member of VMI's class of 1855 and taught drawing there in 1869-70. The painting most likely depicts Jordan's Point as it looked in the early 1860s.

A second oil painting (lower right) is signed by Margaret Hoyt, the wife of a professor at Washington & Lee College who came to Lexington about 1915. According to her obituary she was a well-known artist who exhibited her work throughout the eastern U.S. (RHS has three of her paintings). Looking south across the river, this painting depicts the bridge while it was still in use before the new bridge opened in 1935, after which the siding was removed from the old bridge.

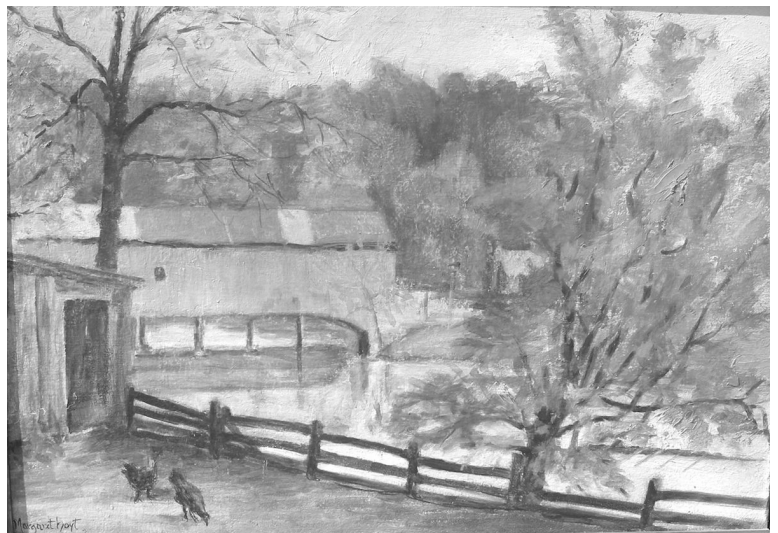
A month after Hoyt's sudden death in 1943, an editorial in the Lexington Gazette lamented that "the bridge is in imminent danger of falling" and urged consideration of repairs in spite of the "very considerable expenditures" they would entail. The bridge was destroyed shortly thereafter.

Margaret Hoyt's husband, Dr. William Hoyt, taught biology but appreciated history and preached the value of personal writings and papers to illustrate "the ways of living of those long-gone" when he spoke to RHS members in 1943 on the importance of collecting these items to preserve social history. His wife contributed by recording Rockbridge history with her art.

As research continues with our collections, we hope to make timely connections with our own programming, and opportune local partnerships. At the same time, we also seek input – and relevant documents or artifacts – from RHS and community members as we enrich our collective understanding of these Rockbridge stories. The last newsletter item featuring the 'Mexican fan' brought valuable insights from one of the donor's descendants; please let us know if you can contribute to our efforts.



Painting of Jordan's Point attributed to James H. Waddell. (Photo by Eric Wilson)



Painting of Jordan's Point by Margaret Hoyt. (Photo by Eric Wilson)

-- Margaret Skovira, *Collections Chair*

Rockbridge Historical Society

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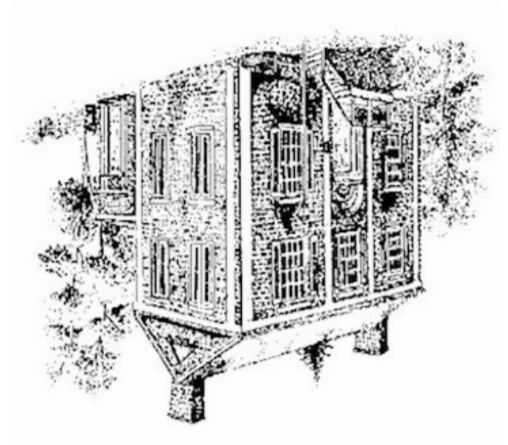
Executive Director Eric Wilson

Newsletter Sally Nunneley

Telephone: 540-464-1058

Email: rochist@hotmail.com

Website: www.rockhist.org



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

ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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