

NEWS - NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

October 2017

Reenactors to visit for 'Apple Days' at Campbell House

The Stonewall Jackson House is expanding its October 21 celebration of Apple Days, and RHS will join them with a range of free activities both inside and outside its historic Campbell House, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., including free refreshments.

As a special feature, RHS will welcome from Pennsylvania the "Ladies for the Union," a group of expert reenactors who portray women of the Civil War era to educate the public about civilian life at that time.

Sitting in the parlor at the Campbell House, the visiting ladies will represent a social gathering with activities that include handwork, games, fashion discussions, and literary readings. They will share photographs (*cartes-de-visites* and stereoviews), engravings and publications, as well as original artifacts used or worn by women during the Civil War. Especially notable is the portrayal of Sophie

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November Program

Remembering Rockbridge in the Great War

To honor the centennial of US entry into World War I, RHS is sponsoring a presentation by historian Dr. Lynn Rainville, "Remembering Rockbridge's Role in the Great War: From Ambulances to War Memorials." The illustrated talk will take place at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday November 5 in Lee Chapel on the campus of Washington and Lee University.

The program will be followed by a reception at the nearby Leyburn Library with a tour of the current exhibit on the

W&L Ambulance Corps (see story below), led by Special Collections staffers Seth McCormick-Goodhart and Tom Camden, both of whom are members of the RHS Board. The exhibit, which closes the next day, draws on treasures

from the University's archives, including many documents and photographs that belong to RHS. As always, these RHS events are free and open to the public.

Dr. Rainville is Research Professor in the Humanities at Sweet Briar College and Director of the Tusculum Institute for Public History; her research has revealed that the Old Dominion played a surprisingly large role during the Great War, supplying the allied forces with food, horses, and steel in 1915-1916 and expanding its efforts after President Woodrow Wilson, a Staunton native, led the country from its isolationist stance to a Declaration of War on April 6, 1917. The war effort

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Dr. Rainville

Program at a Glance

Theme: Rockbridge role in WWI
Date: Sunday, November 5
Talk: 2:00 p.m., Lee Chapel, WLU
Exhibit tour to follow: Leyburn Library, WLU

University's WWI Ambulance Unit highlighted in Leyburn Library

A remarkable WWI-themed exhibit, "The Story of S.S.U.-534, Washington and Lee University's Ambulance Unit in the First World War," is open to the public in the exhibit space in Washington and Lee's Leyburn Library. The exhibit draws on a number of RHS materials and was designed by W&L Special Collections' archivists Byron Faidley, Seth McCormick-Goodhart, Lisa McCown, and Tom Camden. While the exhibit closes November 5, plans are afoot for it to be restaged at Campbell House next year.

The exhibit features artifacts, documents, letters and photographs illuminating the experiences of 36 W&L students, alumni, and faculty volunteers who drove ambulances for France on the Western Front in 1918. The displays are both

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Rockbridge in the Great War

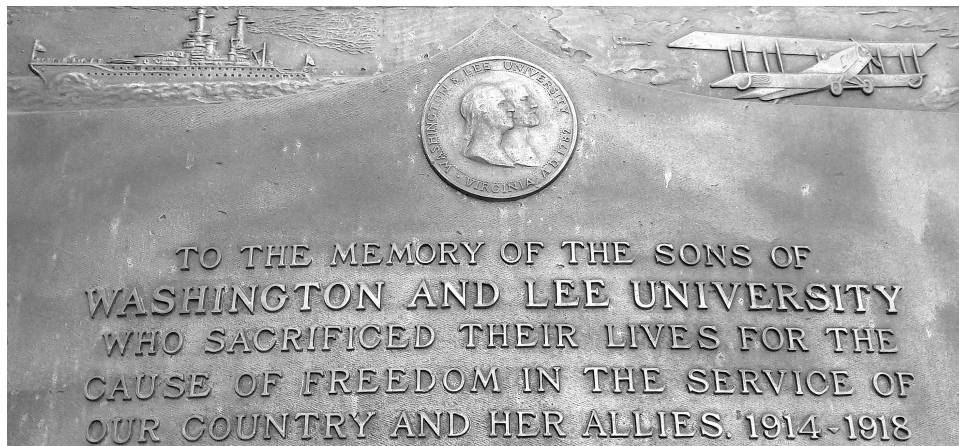
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involved 93,000 soldiers from Virginia as well as nurses, horse trainers and farriers, women stenographers, domestic gardeners, African-American doctors, National Guard troops, and Army chaplains. Students, faculty and alumni from both Virginia Military Institute and Washington and Lee University served and led in this, the first full-scale US military campaign since the Civil War.

Dr. Rainville's presentation will draw from research for her forthcoming book, 'Virginia and the Great War: Mobilization, Combat, and Supply, 1914-1919' and her groundbreaking website lynnrainville.org/ww1-memorials/, which assembles information about WWI memorials, statues and exhibits, and shows correspondence to and from the front as well as histories of notable Virginia regiments and biographies of soldiers. Residents from around Virginia have contributed images, letters and remembrances to help populate the site.

Almost every city and county in the state lost men and women to the war effort, yet many of those sacrifices have faded from memory. Dr. Rainville's study of statues erected in Virginia after the armistice reveals a more complete story of service and sacrifice during WWI. It is fitting that this program will take place just one week before Remembrance Day, initiated after WWI, which later became Veterans Day in the US.

Fittingly, Lee Chapel stands near Memorial Arch, where a beautifully illustrated bronze plaque, shown below, memorializes the sacrifices of W&L students and faculty during the war.



RHS and Apple Days

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Porter, the wife of General Horace Porter: she is an expert quilter and uses the period sewing machine manufactured by James Gibbs of Raphine.

The "husbands" of these talented ladies will gather in the Campbell House garden, portraying actual soldiers of the Union Army, and will explain army life through an interactive 'trunk' of supplies as well as demonstrations of military techniques.

Also outside, we are proud to unveil a new 'Healing Garden,' prepared and interpreted by our Master Gardeners. We will also take the opportunity to dedicate a new bench nestled under the trees, given in honor of Pamela Hemenway Simpson, former RHS President, W&L Professor, and lifelong servant to historic preservation.

Washington Street will be closed between Main and Randolph for this day of community celebration. The public is encouraged to walk down from the Apple Day activities to take a break and 'step back in time.' Join in lively discussions that will give new insights insight into the many aspects of life during the Civil War, and enjoy the fall flourishes of our historic gardens, collectively supported by our dedicated volunteers and your continued financial support.

-Mary Harvey-Halseth, RHS Vice President

Book Review

‘TransAtlantic Sojourners: The Story of an Americo-Liberian Family,’ by Dr. M. Neely Young, II

In 1848, Othello Richards was 51 years old, married, the father of five children, and a Methodist minister. He stood just over 5’ 6,” with a nose disfigured from childhood cancer. He was literate and of high character. And he was a slave.

House servant to the Col. James McDowell family of Rockbridge County, Virginia, Othello was freed by Susan Preston McDowell Taylor (Col. McDowell’s daughter) in October 1848, before her death in April 1849. Othello then set out to purchase the freedom of his wife Mary and his five children, who were owned by the Edmondson family of Rockbridge. He traveled up and down the mid-Atlantic coast and throughout the Northeast, as far as Bangor, Maine, preaching in Methodist churches and raising funds with which to purchase his family. In June 1850, he paid the Edmondsons \$1000 and obtained his family’s freedom. One month later, in July 1850, Othello and Mary and the children sailed out of Baltimore for Liberia, arriving in Monrovia in August.

Thus began the story of the Richards-Coleman family, the subject of Neely Young’s ‘TransAtlantic Sojourners.’ Neely first became aware of Othello Richards while researching his earlier book, ‘Ripe For Emancipation,’ which explored ante-bellum anti-slavery activity in Rockbridge County. In June 2015, he presented a portion of his study of Richards, and Rockbridge for an RHS Program at First Baptist Church, titled “Rockbridge in Liberia: The Colonization Movement in Nineteenth-Century, Virginia.”

Othello Richards is only one part of a much larger saga: the story of the Richards-Coleman family, founders of the Americo-Liberian community that dominated Liberian politics for a century, is virtually the story of Liberia itself, a hybrid nation of American transplants and indigenous Africans. The story includes Othello Richards’ early 1800s experiences working as a slave and Methodist missionary; traveling on the sailing vessel *Liberia Packet* to Monrovia in 1850; carving a sugar and coffee plantation out of the wilderness while watching many of his neighbors die of disease; and raising his children, who would become future leaders of Liberia (especially Wesley Richards and Samuel David Richards).

Young’s study broadens into a history of the growth of the Americo-Liberian community in the nineteenth century, propelled primarily by surpluses from coffee production. It takes the reader into the twentieth century, as political control centralizes and narrows within the Americo-Liberian community, leading to the autocratic presidency of William Tubman and dominance by that community over indigenous Africans, fostering widespread resentment. All this leads to the military coup of Samuel Doe, civil war (1989-1996), rule by Charles Taylor, a second civil war (1999-2003), and the diaspora of the Americo-Liberian community with the flight of many members of the Richards-Coleman family to America, with some returning years later to Liberia as it became more peaceful.

With extensive original research, including many recorded interviews with family members, Neely Young has written what may prove to be an important contribution to a largely unexplored but growing area of African-American scholarship.

— Richard Hubbard, RHS Treasure

Events with Local History Partners

Oct. 18-21. University of Virginia Symposium, “Universities, Slavery, Public Memory and the Built Landscape,” featuring lectures and public dialogue, commemorations and connections with ancestral communities, with field trips to Monticello, Montpelier, and Ash Lawn-Highland. For details and registration visit the web page at slavery.virginia.edu/symposium/.

Oct. 29, “Victory Chef Cook-Off: Cuisine de Casablanca” at 2:00 p.m. behind the Marshall Museum at VMI. Timed to celebrate the secret 1943 Casablanca Conference, three local chefs will cook in the Moroccan style using only the ingredients found in a Morocco pantry. Several area groups will prepare Moroccan-style appetizers. Advance tickets are \$15 for adults and \$5 for students. Purchase at marshallfoundation.org or call 540-463-7103.

Book Review

‘The Confederate Soldiers of Rockbridge County,’ by Robert J. Driver, Jr.

Retired Marine Lt. Colonel Robert "Bob" Driver, RHS member of more than three decades and former member of its Board, has been passionate about history for most of his eighty-plus years. Since 1979, he and his wife, Edna, have resided in Brownsburg, a historic village outside Lexington--an appropriate place for Driver to write his history books. In his latest work, "The Confederate Soldiers of Rockbridge County, Virginia," Driver assembles a magnificent roster of some 4,600 men, every Rockbridge-connected Civil War soldier (not only Confederates) he could identify. With the valuable assistance and collections shared by RHS Trustee Seth McCormick-Goodhart, Driver also provides hundreds of accompanying photographs from both private and public collections.

The result is a rich resource not only for students of military history, who can mine the thousands of synopsised service records for information, but also for social historians, who, for instance, might be interested in the average age of death for Rockbridge veterans or their post-war occupations.

While this book will be an important resource for those with Rockbridge County genealogical interests, it provides even more interesting information. The men are alphabetically listed, and familial relationships between those of the same surname are often noted, offering researchers additional leads. An added benefit is that in these lists researchers seeking information about Rockbridge Civil War veterans will find both vital data and tantalizing personal details: Pvt. George Hostetter could crow "perfectly" like a cock, and often did so during the heat of battle with interesting results; his manner of death is shocking and ironic. And the curious will be prompted to seek further information elsewhere about such soldiers as 1st Lt. James E. A. Gibbs, who invented the revolutionary Wilcox & Gibbs sewing machine (memorably, Gibbs named the Rockbridge town of Raphine after the Greek word meaning "to sew"). And what about Pvt. John M. Henkle and his wife (ancestry.com lists her as Margaret Shafer), who died in Richmond the same day and hour in 1930? Henkle died in the Old Soldier's home. Where did Margaret die? Surely there's a story there.

Perhaps in time, historians will assemble lists of Rockbridge women married to Civil War veterans, as well as free and enslaved blacks who worked for veterans either before or after the war., to make a more complete history of the times. Admittedly, such research would be extremely difficult. Even with the men's service records, Driver's roster of Rockbridge Civil War soldiers required more than twenty years of research and writing. Asked why he took on the challenge, Driver referred to his own military training as a US Marine: *leave no one behind*. And he explains that he also meant to create a memorial. If remembrance is the best monument, then he has indeed created one.

-Marian Faye Novak, co-Editor, *RHS Proceedings, Vol. XIV*

Events that are part of W&L's year-long series on 'Education and History'

Nov. 2, talk by Blaine Brownwell, author of the newly published 'Washington & Lee University, 1930-2000: Tradition and Transformation.' Lee Chapel, time TBD.

Jan. 18, Founder's Day Address by Dr. Charles Dew, a renowned historian of the American South and author of the critically acclaimed book, "Bond of Iron," based on Rockbridge's Buffalo Forge. Lee Chapel, time TBD.

Please consider RHS in year-end giving

As this is the last RHS newsletter for the year, we ask here that you consider contributing to our 2017 Annual Fund. Help us to finish the year on strong financial footing so we can continue to extend our outreach in 2018. You can contribute online at www.rockhist.org/membership, or mail gifts to RHS, P.O. 1409, Lexington VA 24450. Thank you!

W&L Ambulance Corps

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timely and extraordinary, showing both the scope of the Great War and intimate details of everyday life in the field as well as its impact back home and on campus.

Images range from battlefield photographs to recruiting posters for both the Red Cross and soldiers to fill the trenches. A goggle-eyed gas mask implies the horrors of new chemical warfare, while an authentic German ‘Pickelhaube’ helmet – with full imperial spike – reminds us how old, aristocratic Europe would suddenly give way to modern destructive forces.

More charmingly, an illustrated diary from Rockbridge’s Raymond Womeldorf includes postcards that would be sewn in, scrapbook style, to illustrate the variety of correspondence across the Atlantic. A range of materials is drawn from the Kinnear family papers, a recent bequest to RHS Collections. Among the items selected are an arresting military I.D. photo of John Kinnear along with his French *Croix de Guerre* and American Victory Medal. A brim-hatted portrait of Womeldorf is coupled with a jaunty photo next to his ambulance, both predating the loss of his right leg to shrapnel.

Stay tuned for news regarding next year’s exhibit. Our valued partnership with W&L Special Collections and their commitment to support the RHS mission will allow us to add information on other area residents who served in Europe, as well as life in Rockbridge during the 1910s. And it will anchor our 2018 events, activities, and educational outreach on the centenary of the war’s end.



Rockbridge native G. Raymond Womeldorf in 1917 (W&L Special Collections).



Raymond Womeldorf (W&L Class of 1917) poses in front of his ambulance in September 1918, in Ambrief, Aisne, France. (Kinnear Family Papers, RHS Collections, W&L Special Collections Library).

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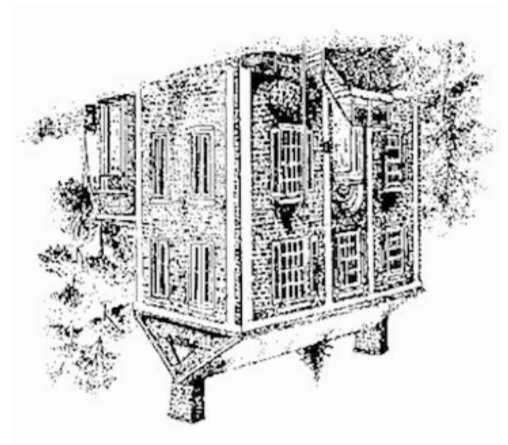
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