

NEWS - NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

January 2020

February Program

Examining the history of Rockbridge's many railroad lines

The first RHS program of 2020 will look afresh at the influence of local railroads on the county's economy, culture, and connections to other parts of the Valley, Virginia, and neighboring states.

Over the past decade, RHS programs and exhibits have featured railroads in specific sites, moments, and areas of impact. The arrival and decline of railroad traffic – and its social and commercial impact – have figured in the Society's community-centered programs, including those on Vesuvius, South River, Goshen, and Natural Bridge Station. The founder of the Chesapeake and Ohio Historical Society dedicated a 2016 program to that iconic line. And a year earlier, a W&L accounting major used historic ledgers from Lexington's popular Dold's Store to illustrate some of the everyday consequences of railroad growth.

RHS collections and volunteers provided foundational resources, images, and artifacts to support the opening of The Miller's House Museum for Transportation and Industry in 2016. And in 2011, an exhibit at the RHS Museum, "When Rails Ruled the Valley," coupled historic memorabilia with dozens of original drawings by Rockbridge artist Louis Caddell, illustrating 19th-Century railroads and depots.

On Sunday, February 9, local historian Byron Faidley will share his broad expertise on regional railroad histories through a slideshow that comprehensively draws together local patterns of rail development and the evolving influence they've had over time. Beyond the tracks of railways themselves, Byron's professional advice and loans from his personal collections have been valued assets in curating recent exhibits for the RHS Museum. No less valuable are the consistent and inventive research support he's provided for a diverse range of RHS projects and programs through his work as a Collections Assistant at Washington & Lee's Special Collections and Archives.

Free and open to the public, this family-friendly program – for train-lovers of all ages! – will be held at 2:30 p.m. in the sanctuary of the historic Manly Memorial Baptist Church.

Program at a Glance

Topic: Rockbridge Rails

Date: Sunday, February 9

Time: 2:30 p.m.

Place: Manly Memorial Baptist Church
202 S. Main Street, Lexington



C&O Engine #375, a light 4-6-0 Ten Wheeler, heads a short passenger train across the Maury River toward East Lexington (Photo ca. 1910, APVA, W&L Special Collections).

Though Rockbridge County's trade was established before the era of the iron horse, it was later shaped by the rail lines that crisscrossed the countryside. George Washington's dream of a canal-based national "great connection" to the west (at the time, that meant the Ohio River) would only be realized later using iron rails.

Throughout the mid-19th Century, Rockbridge citizens clamored for access to the steel lines that made so many small towns boom. The Virginia Central, the Richmond and

See 'Rockbridge Rails,' Page 2

‘Rockbridge Rails’

Continued from Page 1

Alleghany, the Chesapeake and Ohio, the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Baltimore and Ohio, the Valley Railroad (VRR), and the Shenandoah Valley Railroad (SVRR), all looked to the county to play important roles in expansive, and arguably over-built national rail routes.

Faidley observes, “Our county became a battleground for railroad tycoons in their efforts to gain a monopoly on the area’s commerce. Rockbridge County’s landscape still bears the physical evidence of these lines, their construction, and in many cases, their downfall. Some of these schemes worked out, and still contribute to the local economy today, while others have long since faded into memory.”

The most notable competition came between the VRR (backed by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad) and the SVRR (sponsored by the Pennsylvania Railroad). The two lines began construction in the 1870s in Rockbridge, but due to economic problems, neither line was able to connect to this area from their bases north of the Potomac until the next decade. Ultimately, the competition between the two lines saw the demise of their original companies, though one line, currently operated by Norfolk Southern, remains in regular operation today, an important part of the local economy.

“Rockbridge Rails” uses archival documents and photographs to tell the story of rail transportation in and moving through Rockbridge County. Along with Faidley’s original findings, his research also synthesizes the work of several other scholars who have written extensively on our area’s transportation history and its role in the national story.

A native of Covington, Byron Faidley graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 2007. As a cadet, he served as the 2006 Shaara Scholar in Residence at New Market Battlefield. After graduation, he worked for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Historical Society in Clifton Forge and the Alleghany Historical Society (AHS) in Covington. In 2013, Byron co-authored “Images of America: Covington” with the late Horton Beirne, on behalf of the AHS.

Since 2014, Byron has worked at Washington and Lee University, co-managing the Lee Chapel Museum Shop and working as Special Collections Assistant at W&L’s Leyburn Library. He is Vice President of the Miller’s House Museum and also holds a master’s degree in Nonprofit Leadership Studies from the University of Lynchburg.

Historical photographs, maps, and memorabilia will be on display for guests to browse before and after the presentation. For more information, see RockbridgeHistory.org, and check the RHS Facebook page as the event draws near.

Letter from the President

RHS makes property changes to improve resources

Dear Friends, near and far,

As we close our 80th year and look ahead in 2020, we are glad you’re along for the ride. Many changes are in our future, and your enthusiasm, donations, and volunteer support make all this possible.

In December 2019, we closed on the sale of the Castle, one of our historic properties, located on Randolph Street behind the RHS Museum and headquarters. Our Finance Committee – and another committee specifically tasked to assess the property’s role and value to our mission – jointly recommended its sale to strengthen the financial health of RHS. The sale will affect neither the exterior of the building nor the beautiful gardens behind it, as RHS maintains legal historic easements that will preserve the property and neighboring grounds. We continue our ownership of the Campbell House and Sloan House, both maintained to honor their unique histories and our distinctive position in downtown Lexington.

Within the Campbell House, we are now investing in interior upgrades and renovations that will expand and enhance its operation as a community museum, foregrounding a fresh interpretive focus on Rockbridge stories. We look forward to opening as a new and improved museum that honors our local history while also engaging contemporary issues.

With an eye to these goals, in 2018 we purchased a multi-room warehouse in Buena Vista that ensures environment-controlled, secure preservation of our wide range of artifacts and expands the space in which our collections team can better access and organize our historic resources for research and display. Crucially, ownership of that property will enable RHS to make the Campbell House an inviting and dynamic ‘Rockbridge History Center.’

As always, we thank you for your continued support. And we will count on you to help us move ahead together. Please remember to follow us on Facebook, and check our website for continued updates on the changes to come.

— Mary Harvey-Halseth

VMHC focuses on on Black Equality and Women's Suffrage

RHS continues to partner with organizations across the region and state in order to identify and illuminate ways in which our local histories are both related to and distinct from other patterns and people in Virginia history. In that spirit, we draw your attention to two major exhibits at our state's flagship history museum, the Virginia Museum of History and Culture (VMHC). The Richmond exhibits give us valuable contexts to reflect on Rockbridge experience and support the state-centered but nationwide celebration, "American Evolution: 1619-2019," a remarkable range of programs and partnerships that examined the evolving histories of race, gender, and the emergence of democracy and commercial enterprise, all radiating from key 1619 events in Jamestown and colonial Virginia.

Determined: The 400 Year Struggle for Black Equality: The museum writes that "'Determined' offers profiles of 30 individuals, more than 100 evocative objects, and multimedia interpretive content to explore the black experience in Virginia from 1619 to the present day; the pivotal role black Americans have played in shaping America's national identity and culture; the key Virginians and Virginia events that have defined the meaning of American democracy, equality, and justice." A number of related materials, images, and videos can be found at virginiahistory.org/exhibitions, archiving recent programs, and those still ahead.

Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today: The exhibit will open March 7 and run through September, honoring the centennial of the 1920 passage of the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote (it should be noted that the federal amendment was not ratified by the state of Virginia until 1952).

The museum writes that "The passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 radically re-defined the meaning of American democracy by banning gender-based restrictions on voting. This landmark legislation marked the culmination of a concerted fight for women's suffrage and heralded a new age of female participation in American civic life.



Organized in conjunction with the statewide Women's Suffrage Centennial, this exhibition featuring artifacts from the museum's vast collections and new acquisitions made through a major collecting initiative, celebrates a century of women's social and political activism in the Commonwealth."

A special crowdsourcing opportunity now precedes this exhibit's opening, inviting you to contribute directly to the museum's interpretation, programming, and material or digital archives. Connecting both past and present, VMHC asks, "Is there a woman whose activism has inspired you?" The museum is collecting stories and items that celebrate Virginia women as drivers of change. Share your stories past or present and related items at virginiahistory.org/node/2701. And thank you to the several RHS members who have already let us know of their submissions, in local pride and purpose!

Members of the Equal Suffrage League of Richmond pose in and around an automobile in Capitol Square, 1915 (Virginia Museum of History and Culture, gift of Adele Clark).

Note that the two shows will be open at the same time between March 9 and March 29. If you'd like to experience the exhibits with Rockbridge neighbors, let us know. Shared interest might spur us to organize an 'RHS Field Trip' to see the two shows and visit with VMHC staff. So email us at RHS@RockbridgeHistory.org if you'd like to explore that initiative.

Rockbridge Historical Society Officers

President & Programs: Mary Harvey-Halseth
Vice President & Education: Harper Donahoe
Vice President for Property: Peter Simpson
Treasurer & Finance: Greg Frederick
Secretary: Paul Barron

Directors

Membership: Tom Roberts
Publications: Pat Gibson
At Large: Julie Goyette

Ex-officio

Archives: Tom Camden

Trustees

Peggy Webster Hays
Margaret Skovira

Executive Director: Eric Wilson

Newsletter: Sally Nunneley

Telephone: 540-464-1058

Email: RHS@RockbridgeHistory.org

Website: RockbridgeHistory.org

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



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