

Confederate Memorial day was observed on June 3rd, by appropriate exercises in the Lee chapel, followed by a parade of the veterans and cadets to the Lexington cemetery, where the latter fired three volleys in honor of the departed dead.



Decoration Day  
Last Thursday, National Decoration Day, was observed in Lexington by the closing of the postoffice and banks, and special services at the First Baptist church, with addresses appropriate to the occasion. Afterwards a large procession, composed of the various organizations of colored people, such as fraternal societies and church organizations, watched to the colored cemetery and decorated the graves with flowers.

YOUNG WOMEN from Lexington's Ann Smith Academy are shown at the grave of "Stonewall" Jackson in this circa 1866-67 photo. AT LEFT is a notice of local Confederate Memorial Day ceremonies on June 3 in 1910, published in the VMI student newspaper. AT RIGHT is a notice of National Decoration Day ceremonies on May 30, 1907, observed by local Black citizens.

## Memorial Days

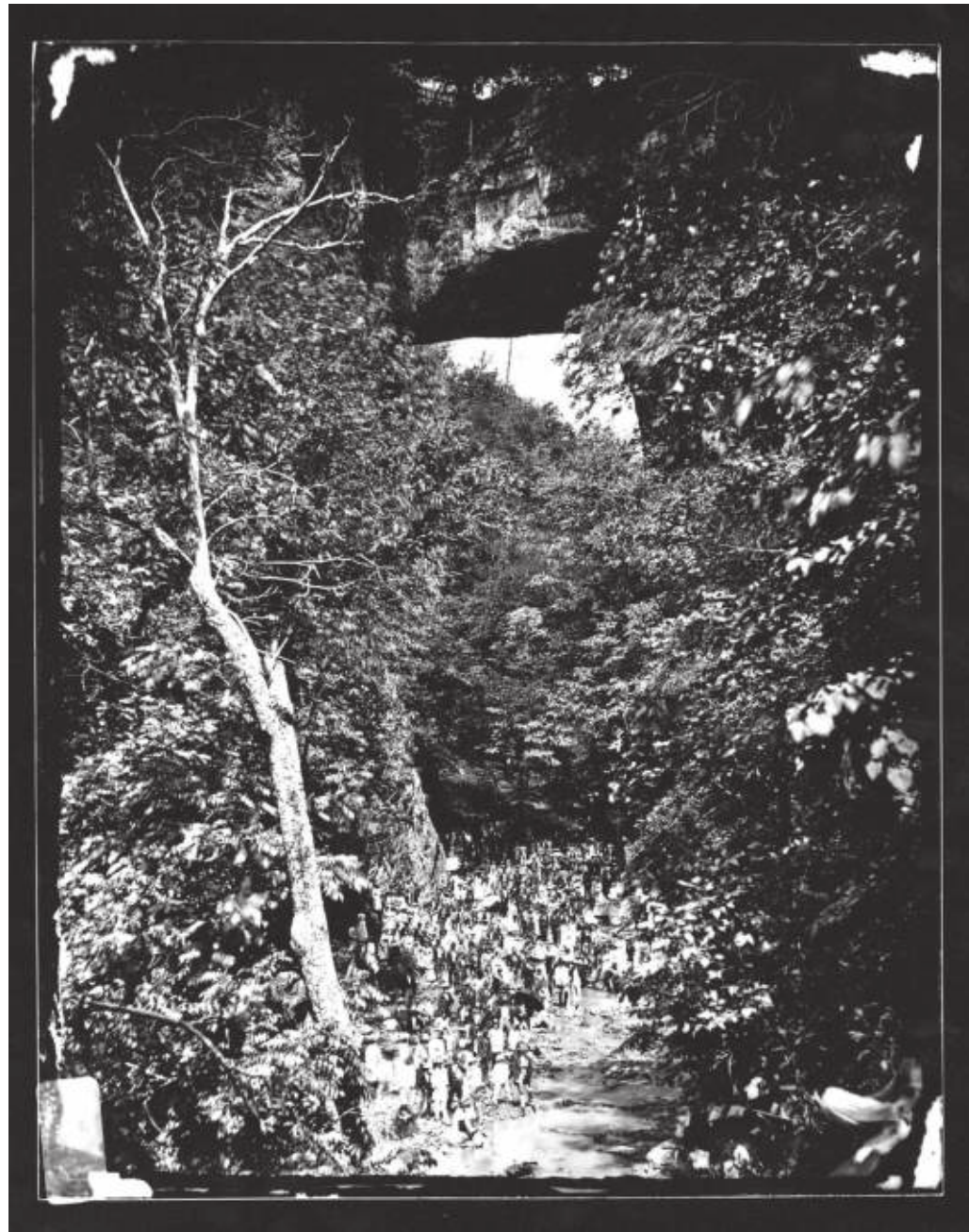
### How Lexington's Traditions Evolved

This is the first of a series, written by Rockbridge Historical Society Executive Director Eric Wilson, illuminating the shifting histories of local Memorial Day traditions. This opening installment looks to the holiday's broad origins right after the Civil War, and the early growth of local commemorative traditions and gatherings, into the late 19th century. The series will continue into the early decades of the 20th century. For more details, illustrations and histories of other holidays, see [RockbridgeHistory.org/rhs-essays](http://RockbridgeHistory.org/rhs-essays).

Fifty years ago, in 1971, Memorial Day found a fixed time in America, and a fixed name.

Three years earlier, Congress had passed the Uniform Holiday Act, anchoring "Memorial Day" to the last Monday in May. Congress' decision was not idly timed, either. Just over a century earlier, in 1868, Gen. John Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic had declared May 30 to be the standing date of "Decoration Day," to honor the sacrifice of those who'd died in national military service.

One hundred years ago, in 1921, Memorial Day was celebrated in Lexington on June 3, the date that had become ritually fixed for its local observance, just over a decade earlier. Since the turn of the century, in fact, that date — Jefferson Davis' birthday — had become the commemorative, regional touchstone across a sweep of Southern states. With the distance from hostilities, celebrations grew in number and in scale, and their combination of



THIS 1884 photo by Michael Miley shows the reunion of members of the Stonewall Brigade and New York's Niagara Rifles at Natural Bridge. (W&L Special Collections)

more somber and more spirited events were increasingly, formally heralded as "Confederate Memorial Day."

And yet only four days before, in neighboring counterpart, May 30 would also and annually be recognized, here and broadly, as "Federal Memorial Day," or "National Decoration Day," since its own federal designation in 1868. In Rockbridge and the Shenandoah Valley, those gatherings were smaller, not as widely held through Virginia's first post-war generations. Regionally, Decoration Day was more regularly noted for the services and parades organized by African-American citizens, in an area where the gravesites and descendants of Union soldiers were fewer, and less publicly fronted in "The New South."

#### Early Memorial Days

As it happens, the very first large-scale Memorial Day ceremony was inaugurated not in a public square, or a church cemetery, but at a mass grave in Charleston, S.C. According to historian David Blight (whose book "Race and Reunion: The Civil War and American Memory" remains a classic on post-Civil War cultural politics) this remarkable assembly came together in the recently liberated "Capital of Secession," May 1, 1865, only three weeks after the surrender at Appomattox.

The gathering of 10,000, most of whom were freedmen and women who'd been liberated by the arrival of the U.S. Army that February, was highlighted by the marching of United States Colored Troops, and the fabled

54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. That regiment is known to many today through the film "Glory," and has been memorialized by Augustus Saint-Gaudens' statue on the Boston Common, and through an iconic and ironic poem by Robert Lowell, "For the Union Dead," meditating on what communities say they want to remember ... and what they don't.

Surprisingly to many, over 60 Black men from Rockbridge (some free before the war, some enslaved) found their varied ways to fight in more than 30 Union regiments, including the 54th and companion 55th Massachusetts regiments, both of which fought with Gen. William T. Sherman's armies at Charleston.

For more on this reach of Rockbridge participation, and a range of recent research findings, see [RockbridgeHistory.org](http://RockbridgeHistory.org) for details and the Zoom link for RHS' June 14 program, presented by Larry Spurgeon and Cinder Stanton, "Fighting for Freedom: Black Union Soldiers from Rockbridge."

Remarkably, records of that first post-Civil War ceremony further note that an astonishing 3,000 children participated, singing "John Brown's Body" and carrying armfuls of flowers to decorate the graves of United States soldiers who'd died in a POW camp at the city's former horse-racing track, and were buried there, en masse.

After surrender and emancipation, after the waves of muster-

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## Juneteenth Celebration Takes To The Street

### Communitywide Event June 19 In Lexington

Editor's note: The following story was written by Lindsey Nair with Washington and Lee University.

Three years ago, a small group at Washington and Lee University began to collect information about Black cultural programming within a 75-mile radius, circulating it to interested parties in a monthly newsletter called "Groove." Eventually, they noticed a pattern: Organi-

zations were limiting their own attendance by holding events on the same day that were of interest to the same audience.

They decided to establish a more organized group, Spotlighting Black Rockbridge, that would bring together representatives of all the major players — including city government, nonprofits, colleges, historical societies and civic groups — to plan great community events that don't overlap one another but benefit from the power of collaboration.

One significant result of that effort will take place on June 19, when all members of the community are invited to downtown Lexington for a Juneteenth cel-

ebration that will include an art show, dance performance, live music, themed restaurant offerings, and a free raffle with prizes that include gift certificates to downtown businesses. View the entire schedule of events online at [my.wlu.edu/juneteenth](http://my.wlu.edu/juneteenth).

"It has been extremely gratifying to be part of this movement to bring together community organizations to celebrate Black history and the history of our nation," said Sascha Goluboff, director of W&L's Office of Community-Based Learning and a professor of sociology and anthropology. "I anticipate an increased interest in collaborative efforts going forward, and I can't

wait for the Juneteenth festivities to begin."

This year's celebration will mark the first time a community-wide Juneteenth event has taken place in Lexington. One of the anchoring events will be the Juneteenth Art Show, which was organized for the first time last year by Lexington nonprofit Project Horizon.

"We are very excited about the way it's growing beyond the original piece of what we are doing," said Judy Castele, executive director of Project Horizon. "To see it become a community event that the city, the university

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THE PAINTING "Mama Lu" by Linda Powell was a winner in last year's Juneteenth Art Show.

## Memorial Days

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ing out and the homecomings of soldiers, or coffins, the restoration of families and communities — even when torn by loss — brought the urgency of both personal and shared mourning rituals. Caroline Janney, director of University of Virginia's Nau Center Civil War History, has written extensively about the crucial role that women played in this process, not just as individuals and in families, but in developing new women's organizations with collective clout. Their utility and advocacy was particularly important in post-war years when many men's public voices (as former Confederate leaders or soldiers) remained subject to political or legal scrutiny.

Community-specific Ladies Memorial Associations — and later, broader regional and national membership organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy or the Confederated Southern Memorial Association — would work to develop the rituals, commemorative vocabulary, the floral and flag-borne iconography, even the public architecture through which family and community members could be meaningfully, routinely remembered.

Pictured with this feature is a widely reproduced photograph (ca. 1866-67) that shows young women from Lexington's Ann Smith Academy gathered under the trees at the first gravesite of Gen. Thomas J. Jackson, buried in 1863 in the cemetery of the Lexington Presbyterian Church where he'd served as a deacon.

When Jackson was reburied in 1891, along with the installation of Edward Valentine's monumental bronze, tens of thousands came to bear respects, and to bear witness to the changing politics "New South." A de-

cade and a half, then, after the failure of Reconstruction, and nearing the era of legislative Redemption, that more fully restored white cultural and political supremacy across most former Confederate states.

### Remembrance And Reunion In the Valley

Given their populations and place in the war's campaigns, Valley towns like Staunton and Winchester held larger memorial services, and earlier than most that were recorded here. Starting in the 1870s, the Staunton Spectator regularly noted the Memorial Day marching of large numbers of Southern veterans, fraternal orders, temperance organizations, schoolchildren and teachers, hours of speeches and sermons, and the flourishes of the heralded Stonewall Band.

Given the presence of a Union Cemetery on the edge of town, an 1871 article also makes note of the early emergence of parallel remembrance rituals there. Only three years after the fixing of Decoration Day on May 30, local African-American residents decorated the graves of Union soldiers — though surely unknown to them personally — with their own "evergreens," that common symbol for commemorating the dead.

From the more somber to more festive, the tenor of these observances would also evolve, as would the people involved. In a defining event, in May 1883, former members of the 5th Virginia Regiment of the "Stonewall Brigade" traveled to New York on the eve of Decoration Day (the contingent may have included members of the "Rockbridge Rifles"). They headed north, this time by train, to meet their former foes, the 28th New York Infantry, popularly known

as the "Niagara Rifles." The highlight of the visit: the return of the New Yorkers' "bullet-ridden flag," captured by the Virginians at the Battle of Cedar Mountain in 1862.

Moved by the spirit of reconciliation, and the repression of old wounds, the Union veterans group traveled south for the first time, the following year, to revisit many of their old battlefields in the Valley. Staying for several days' festivities in Staunton, their large party ("98 surviving veterans, accompanied by 150 citizens, 75 of whom were ladies") included a notable excursion to Lexington in late May 1884 as the Memorial Day season arrived. Paying homage to the graves of the famous generals interred here was a signal event, and heartily welcomed by the run of local dignitaries, a number of them former Confederate officers themselves.

Further affirming this symbolic coupling — and furthering the long-standing coupling of Niagara Falls and Natural Bridge in the American imagination and arts — an outing to Rockbridge's namesake landmark brought memorable spring flourish to the events. Twenty-two years after they'd fought, 100 miles from their battlefield near Culpeper, the veterans' serene gathering appears to be the subject of an arresting bird's-eye-view by celebrated Rockbridge photographer, Michael Miley, who'd fought with the Stonewall Brigade himself (to date, no earlier image of the Bridge has been found that is this populated, whether painted or photographed).

Crammed into the streambed of Cedar Creek, men wear top hats, their lapels blazoned with barely visible but telling veterans' ribbons, with upraised banners scattered through the crowd



THE FIRST large-scale Memorial Day ceremony took place at a mass grave in Charleston, S.C., just weeks after the surrender at Appomattox in 1865. The event included 3,000 children decorating the graves of the Union soldiers who had died in a POW camp at the city's former horse racing track, and were buried there en masse.

of men and women. Formal finery and parasols replace bloody torn uniforms, and tattered flags. All together, they signal a natural tempering of war, a national turn toward reconciliation — new chords of memory, en masse.

This reunion occurred seven years before the bronze statue of Stonewall Jackson was raised, in 1891, in the cemetery that would be named for him over a half-century later. That event drew people from across the South and the still-growing United States, increasing Lexington's place in the national spotlight.

### Memory, Ahead

This series will continue by moving into the 20th century, examining a run of annual events that worked to affirm Confederate memory, heritage, and traditions in a range of public spaces,

and social associations. The Confederate Day dedication of the new Rockbridge Courthouse in 1897 would be a signal event. As would 1907, which also affords a compelling comparison with the long day-and-evening's run of Decoration Day events, held earlier in that regional and national memorial week.

For the local African-American community, that nationally flagged holiday would stage some of its collective rituals at the town's two Black cemeteries, parading up the hill from its churches on Main and Randolph Streets. And yet, it would also conclude with a uniquely striking, multiracial, and wholly resonant operatic and fundraising flourish.

Forty years after Emancipation, and five years after a new 1902 state constitution that had

rolled back some of the recently gained political freedoms for Black citizens, those commemorative chords are in many ways paralleled, vitally counterpointed, but occasionally partnered in shaping the score of memory — through voice and music, memorial marches, if not military volleys.

With a century's space from our own, that week's range of events also emphasizes how varied such community gatherings ever are, and how they keep evolving.

This year, that's all the more evident on the eve of Lexington's and Virginia's first formal holiday recognitions of Juneteenth, June 19. Another signature national summertime holiday date, bringing its own keys to the growth of American cultural identity.



## Placing Flags For Memorial Day

Boy Scout Troop 5 of Lexington and VFW Auxiliary Post 7814 and members at large placed flags by military grave-stones at Rockbridge Memorial Gardens for Memorial Day. The flags were provided by VFW Post 1499 and a total of 576 flags were placed at Rockbridge Memorial Gardens, Oxford Presbyterian and Kerrs Creek Baptist cemeteries. Pictured are (front row, from left) Betty Seaman, Parker Zollman, Scottie Martin, Andrew Lemmer, Will Wranek, Tom Maxwell, Judy Goodbar, Trevor Harlin, Harper Harlin, Scoutmaster Jamie Maxwell, (second row) Commander Bernard Goodbar, Mac Baker, Spc. James Baker, Trey Lewis, Ryan Maxwell, Noah Alexander, Aidan Hart, JJ Nappi, Steve Hart and John Wranek. Not pictured were Hudson Ryan, Scott Lemmer, Brandon Zollman and Lisa Harlin from Troop 5 and several others from VFW Auxiliary Post 7814.

## Juneteenth

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and others are involved in, that's exciting for us. It is exciting to see the community invested in these efforts."

Juneteenth, a portmanteau of "June" and "19th," commemorates the end of slavery in the United States. It originated in Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865, when U.S. Army Gen. Gordon Granger arrived there to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation. Although President Abraham Lincoln had signed the proclamation nearly three years before, on Sept. 22, 1862, it was not immediately adopted across all states. Enforcement depended on the advancement of U.S. troops, which were scarce in remote Texas, so it became a final holdout. The enforcement of emancipation there after a long wait was truly cause for celebration.

The first Juneteenth celebration took place in Galveston on June 19, 1866, and it has since caught on across the country. Although it is not a federal holiday, only three U.S. states — Hawaii, North Dakota and South Dakota — have yet to recognize it as a state holiday. Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam declared it a permanent paid state holiday in June 2020, and Lexington adopted it as a formal city holiday this year.

"I can't speak for City Council, [but] I think it focuses more attention on a date and an event that is important to the entire nation — particularly important, of course, to Black Americans," said Lexington City Manager Jim Halasz, who has served on Spotighting Black Lexington. "As I've been reflecting on this, it did occur to me that it wasn't until Juneteenth that all men and women in this country were free, and that our laws, our constitution and our Declaration of Independence did not apply to all Americans until that date. That's pretty significant."

The Juneteenth planning group includes representatives from all over Lexington and Rockbridge County, including the city of Lexington, CARE Rockbridge, Rockbridge NAACP, Project Horizon, 50 Ways Rock-

bridge, Washington and Lee University, Virginia Military Institute, the Rockbridge Historical Society, Historic Lexington Foundation, Randolph Street United Methodist Church and First Baptist Church of Lexington. Members have been meeting periodically on Zoom since early 2021.

"Having the right people at the table and having regular conversations are two things that have been invaluable," said Michael Hill, professor of Africana studies at W&L. "Conversations or developments that could take days or weeks are taken care of in minutes." For example, he said, obtaining the appropriate permits for street closures could have been a lengthy process, but having Halasz and Lexington City Council member Marilyn Alexander at the meeting made that task a breeze. "I think it's been a wonderful experience, and hopefully it will be the foundation of collaborations connected to MLK and other anchoring programs that exist across the calendar year," Hill said.

Program activities begin prior to June 19, starting with Project Horizon's Juneteenth Art Show, which opened at Nelson Gallery on Washington Street on June 2. The exhibition will be open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, through June 26. Cash prizes will be awarded to art show winners, and anyone can help select the People's Choice Award winner by voting on the Project Horizon website prior to June 19.

On Monday, June 14, the Rockbridge Historical Society will host a Zoom presentation called "Fighting for Freedom: Black Union Soldiers from Rockbridge," which will tell the story of more than 60 Black men from the county who served in 28 Civil War regiments, enlisting in 13 states. Visit RockbridgeHistory.org for the Zoom link. A few days later, on June 17, W&L's Africana Studies Program will host a Zoom movie screening and discussion of "Miss Juneteenth."

The festivities on June 19 kick off at noon with music at Hopkins Green, where complimentary cookies from W&L Catering will

be distributed while supplies last. At 2 p.m., Kuumba Dance Ensembles of Lynchburg will provide a West African drum and dance experience at the park.

From there, the celebration moves to Washington Street, which will be closed to traffic between South Jefferson and South Main streets. Steel drum band Oasis Island Sounds will play live music in the street from 5 to 7 p.m., at the same time as the Juneteenth Art Show reception in nearby Nelson Gallery. A free raffle will take place at the art show, and entrants must sign up for the raffle at the gallery between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. on June 19. At 6 p.m., during the band's performance break, winners of both the art show and the raffle will be announced. Raffle participants must be present to win.

Raffle prizes consist of gift certificates that have been donated by Main Street Lexington and multiple downtown Lexington restaurants. The participating restaurants also plan to feature a special Juneteenth menu item all weekend.

In coordination with the Juneteenth event, librarians at W&L, VMI and Rockbridge Regional libraries are jointly creating a reading list and a guide to artifacts from the archives.

Program planners said that while Juneteenth has always been an important occasion, it is now more in the public consciousness as both local and national events focus attention on racial inequities and the importance of honoring Black history as part of American history. And as related conversations continue to take place in Lexington, they said, it provides an important opportunity for community-building.

"We face a propitious moment," Hill said. "We are making decisions about the fabric of our community, and those decisions will determine our future. Individuals attempt to create an identity. Our town and county seek to construct a fresh sense of civic possibility. We all contribute humble but earnest effort to the process, and events like Juneteenth are grist for the mill."



## All-Stars At Boxerwood

The Rockbridge Bluegrass All-Stars kick off the 2021 series of Music in the Garden concerts at Boxerwood this Friday, June 11, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Band members include Burr Datz on guitar and vocals; Dan Newhall on bass, blues harp and vocals; Blake Shester on banjo and vocals, and Andy Williams on fiddle. The quartet plays a mix of traditional, contemporary and progressive Bluegrass with a high lonesome three-part harmony. The gate opens at 6 p.m. for picnics and socializing. Admission is free for Boxerwood members, \$5 for nonmembers. Children (under age 18) and parking are free. Pass-the-hat proceeds go to the musicians. Food will be available from a food truck. Bring lawn chairs or blankets. In the event of rain, the concert will be canceled.

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