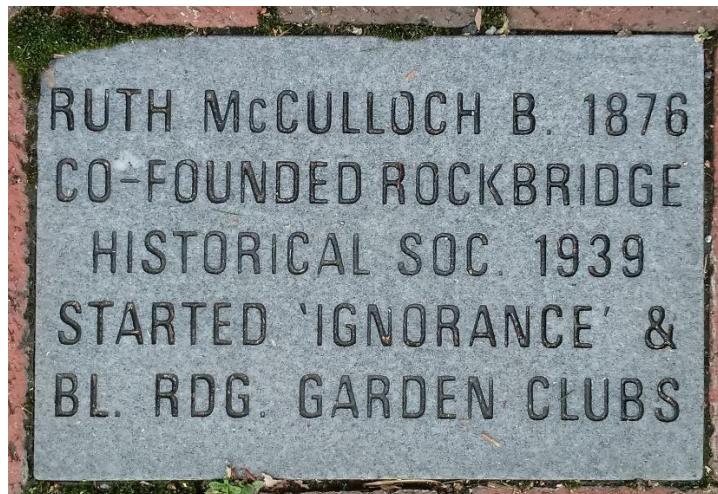


## ***Walk with the Women of Rockbridge History***

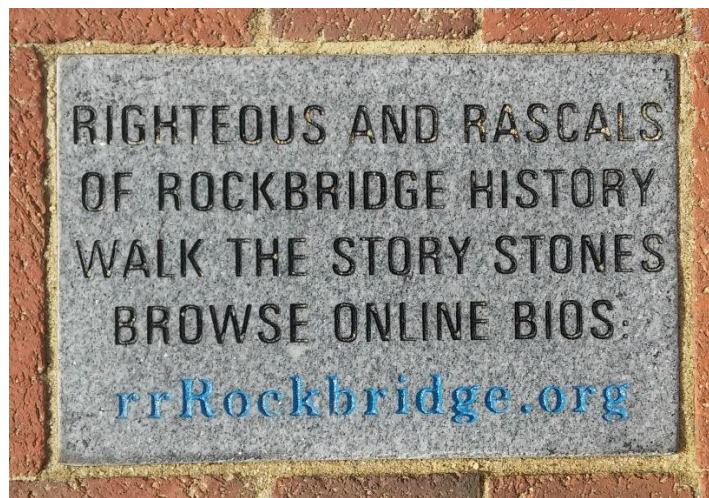
**Eric Wilson, Executive Director, Rockbridge Historical Society**

In the heart of Women's History Month, on Sunday, March 17, the Rockbridge Historical Society will lead a guided tour that invites you to "Walk with the Women of Rockbridge History." The family-friendly outing is open to everyone – schoolchildren to seniors – ready to share a Main Street walk and eager to talk with relatives, familiar friends, and new neighbors in this community-building journey into the past.

To front the one-hour's interactive tour, participants should gather by 2:30 PM at Campbell House, RHS' historic 1845 headquarters and museum (101 E. Washington St., right across from the Visitor Center), returning there to close the event. Visitors can enjoy the back gardens for St. Patrick's Day green, or browse local history displays inside the museum, previewing the tour by exploring artifacts and interpretive displays that spotlight many of the women to be featured during the walk itself.



After brief opening remarks onsite, RHS Executive Director Eric Wilson will lead the group through four blocks of downtown Lexington, pausing at a series of 'stations' up and down Main and Nelson Streets. At each location, he will share thumbnail biographies, photographs, and related historical materials to distinctly frame the lives of eight of the women who are variously commemorated in the sidewalk-installed 'Story Stones' of RHS' 'Righteous and Rascals of Rockbridge' project, and accompanying mobile-friendly website at [RRRockbridge.org](http://RRRockbridge.org).



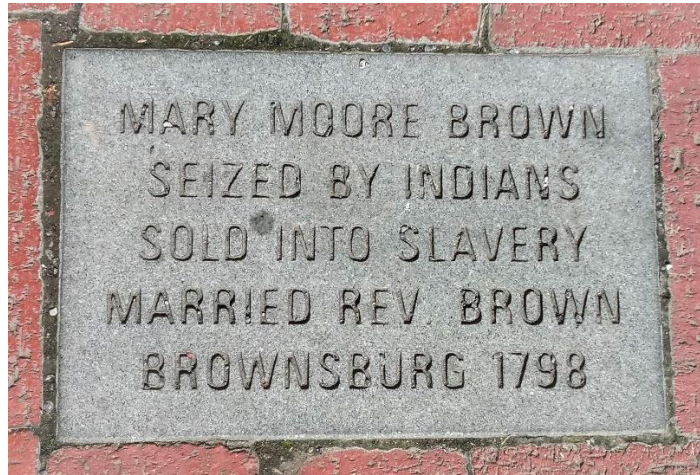
Staff from the Stonewall Jackson House, and George C. Marshall Museum will also share stories along the way, recruited to interpret often underestimated roles that women played in the lives and traditional narratives chronicling those landmark Lexington generals. Questions and conversation are very much encouraged during the walk itself, but before wrapping up at 4:00 PM, attendees can also share their voices, reflections, and direct family ties in quieter, seated discussions at the Museum.

The women chosen for the tour draw from four centuries of local history. They range from the first white female settler in 18<sup>th</sup> century Rockbridge, to women who survived frontier violence and the 1864 Civil War attack and occupation of Lexington. They creatively constellate 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century performing artists, activists, and community leaders who founded a range of organizations dedicated to preserving history and the environment, cultivating audiences for the arts, music, and literature. In the vital arenas of education, one helped lead the charge to build better schools and relief organizations for local African-American citizens in the 1920s, while another played a key role in finally bringing co-education to one of the oldest universities in the nation, in 1985.



RHS Executive Director Eric Wilson notes the timely aspect of addressing women's histories more fully, not just in March, but in an evolving cultural climate for public history programming across the state and nation. More broadly, he adds, "We're excited to try out another variation on our historic walking tours. After Mark Cline's impersonations of the paver bios at Wells Fargo Plaza at the 2016 Grand Opening, we partnered with First Baptist Church for a 2017 Black History Month celebration and walking tour centered on African-Americans commemorated in those 'Story Stones.'"

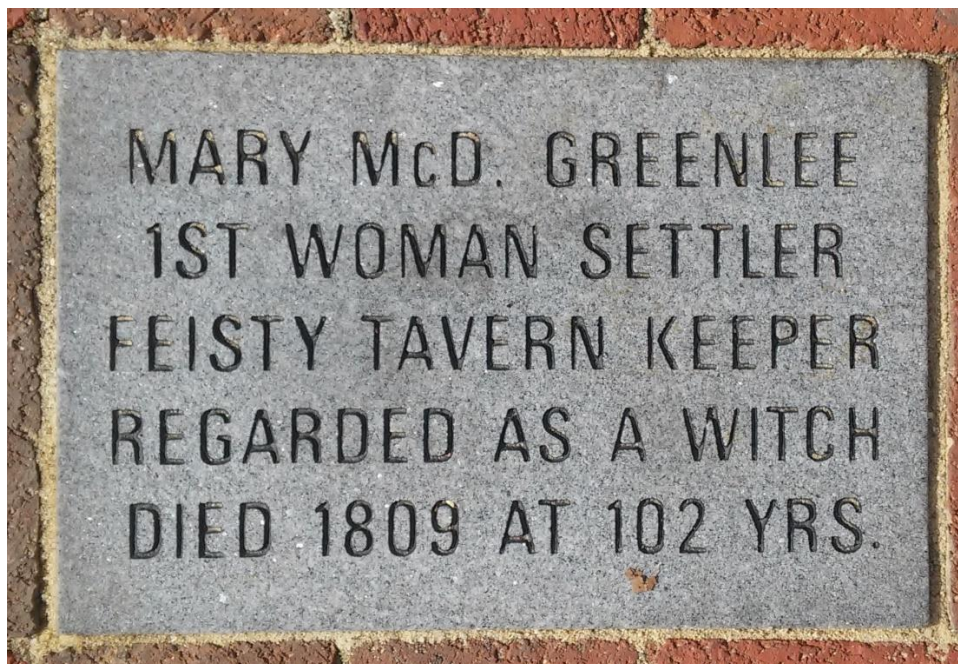
Other outings have included a 70-person family reunion, a W&L-themed walk tailored to alumni groups, and RHS' annual tour with 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Students, variously selecting different themes, and spotlighting different figures, to accommodate a variety of audiences, and issues of current relevance.



“Everyone in our community has a stake in women’s histories,” Wilson continues. “So we’re looking forward to exploring new conversations, and fielding feedback that can help us make this historic “trail” an authentic, flexible resource for a broad reach of community residents, and visiting tourists.”

The profiles below provide teasers for the tour’s broader survey of the illuminating variety of life and leadership that distinguished these often overlooked women from Rockbridge history.

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Mary McDowell Greenlee has sometimes been called “The Mother of Rockbridge County,” and conventionally recognized as the first white woman settler in this part of the Valley. No less eye-catching is her longevity, spanning the full arc of the colonial and revolutionary 18<sup>th</sup> century, dying in 1809 at the age of 102. An immigrant from Ulster, she traveled into the Great Valley of Virginia with her husband James as part of the frontier wave of predominantly Protestant ‘Scots-Irish’ land-seekers: many of who moved from

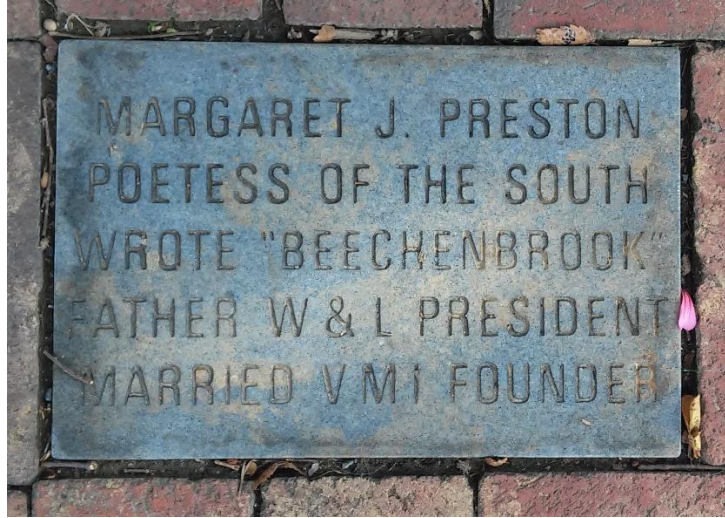
Pennsylvania and into this area starting in the 1730s, a half-century before Rockbridge County would be carved out from the southern half of Augusta County, in 1778. First living in the Timber Ridge area, and then near Natural Bridge for her final decades, Mary's place in the extensive McDowell family connects her experiences to the range of prominent early leaders of Rockbridge, who would variously serve as Borden Grant surveyor and Governor of Virginia, become medical and militia leaders, argue for free schools and alternatively for and against slavery. One of the McDowell women born in Fairfield's Red House would even become the namesake for a group of Union Spies during the Civil War (join the tour, for more details).

For her own part, Mary McDowell Greenlee was perhaps most notable in her own era – and also relevant to our own – for her entrepreneurial inventiveness as a tavern keeper who managed to retain her property and right to trade, while surviving three husbands, not to mention the 18<sup>th</sup> century trials of giving birth to and raising eight children. Her assertive, sometimes eccentric behavior raised eyebrows of both her white and Native American neighbors, customers, and workers. Most memorably, if unsuccessfully, a trial accusing her of being a witch evidently tried to hold her in check, restraining her to a more conventional feminine sphere and standards. Her feisty resilience is commemorated in a stained glass window that can be seen at RHS' Museum before or after the tour, with the concluding inscription: "Mary Greenlee died of late,/ Straight she went to Heaven's gate,/ But Abram met her with a club,/ And knocked her back to Beelzebub."



**1989 Stained Glass Window (installed at RHS' Museum at Campbell House):  
Zoom in for Inscription chronicling her trial, and neighbors' suspicions**

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In genealogical terms, Margaret Junkin Preston’s bios often begin by noting that she was sister to Elinor (first wife of VMI Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, and future Confederate General Thomas J. Jackson), married to J.T.L. Preston (Latin Professor and key founder of VMI), daughter to Pennsylvanian minister George Junkin (who was invited to serve as President of Washington College in 1848, before resigning in 1861 in response to student and faculty calls for secession). While these ties have largely been framed through her relationships to more familiar men, her most distinct accomplishments are evident in her commitments to literature, letter-writing, and education.

Along with her spouse and brother-in-law, Mrs. Preston helped to lead a ‘Sabbath School’ for enslaved and free African-Americans, at Lexington Presbyterian Church. During the Civil War, her writings chronicled civilian life in Lexington in vivid social and emotional detail: before the 1864 attack of Hunter’s Raid, the burning of VMI and flight of Confederate troops, and the tensions of the Union occupation that followed. Her most famous book-length poem, *Beechenbrook: A Rhyme of War*, was widely popular in the decades following its publication in 1865. While its epic tenor and lengthy strains no longer command the taste of most readers of poetry today, her long narrative poem, lamenting the costs of war in the Confederacy, earned her the epithet “The Poetess of the South.”



At Campbell House, visitors can see the desk Preston wrote at – unusually shortened, to suit her stature – as well as her remarkable painted ‘Fancy Chair,’ adorned with a painting of Natural Bridge. It’s not yet sure whether she specifically commissioned the illustration of the Bridge, as a local resident; it may alternatively have been manufactured and purchased as part of the era’s international trend to display images of that iconic, symbolic namesake of Rockbridge. Regardless, Margaret’s taste, no less than her writerly accomplishments and distinct social vision are part of what has drawn the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts to request the chair’s loan for an upcoming exhibit on “Virginia’s Arcadia: Natural Bridge in American Art.

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Eliza Bannister Walker, like many of history’s more dynamic figures, was many things to many people. A praised singer in the local choral group, “The Nightingales,” Miss Bannister married Harry Lee Walker, the man who would become one of Lexington’s most prominent businessmen, and the man for whom Willson-Walker House (now Macado’s) would be named in witness of his family business’ long tenure there.



Trained as a nurse in Washington, DC, Mrs. Walker was canny enough to use her social standing, civic ties, and communication skills for a wide range of social, political, and charitable campaigns. She served as President of the Rockbridge Walker Chapter of the Virginia Federation of Colored Women, hosting its statewide conference at her large home atop Henry St., in 1921.

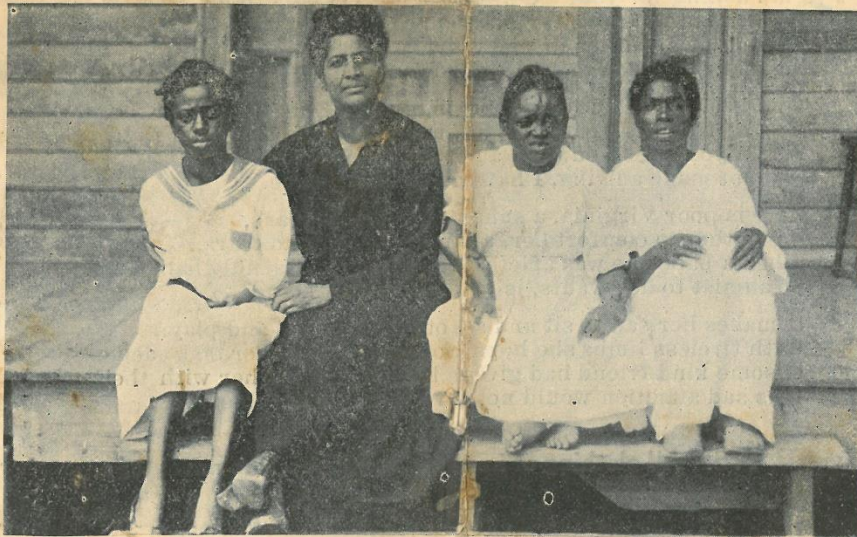
During the throes of WWI, Walker launched a local and regional charity drive, mass-producing postcards for a direct mail campaign headed, “The Colored Soldiers Appeal.” Extending her reach even further, she placed newspaper advertisements in East Coast newspapers, blazoning her bona fides from preachers, businessmen, churches, orchestras, and veterans groups in Richmond, Washington, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Kansas City, asking citizens well beyond Lexington to “Buy a Brick” to support the creation of a “Colored Old Folks Home and Orphanage.” For the same cause, on handbills addressed from “Mrs. H. L. Walker, Sanitary Meat Market, Lexington, VA,” Eliza published original poems for contributions of “at least 25 cents.” Some lyrics were voiced in the tenor and dialect of traditional spirituals; others were dedicated to the campaign of the first African-American Congressmen elected in the North, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chicago’s Oscar De Priest.

To the Public:  
**The Colored Soldier's Appeal**

HELP THE SUFFERING OF OUR RACE

Buy a Memorial Block and Help us to Take Care  
of the Colored Old Folks and Needy Orphan Children.  
We are Asking Someone to Educate Little Violet.


MEMORIAL BLOCK

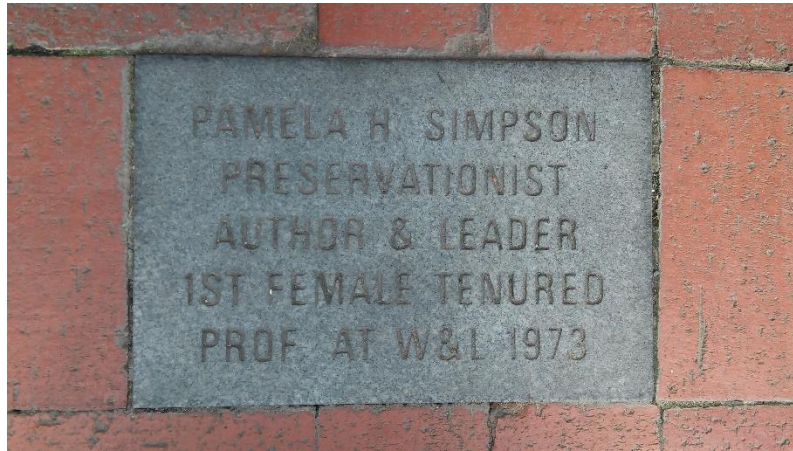


Violet	Mrs. H. L. Walker	Virginia	Annie
An Orphan Freak	Pres. of Lexington's Old	Cannot Walk	Cannot Talk
Born without Hands	Folks Home and Orphanage		

***World War I era fundraising campaign postcard. Led by Eliza Walker, appealing to the wartime service of 'Colored Soldiers' to enlist funding for charitable relief organizations for African-Americans in Lexington.***

In the 1920s, Walker petitioned Lexington officials to protect local black workers from “imported servants, very often cheaper than the accustomed to our local servants;” and she also lobbied to replace the overcrowded African-American school on Randolph Street. Part of a local and national advocacy network that would even draw funding from the Rosenwald Schools foundation, her efforts are still witnessed in the 1927 creation of Lylburn Downing School in 1927, established as a new home for Rockbridge’s black schoolchildren (if only grades 1-10).

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The Righteous and Rascals of Rockbridge's most recent honoree – and most personally familiar to many – is Pam Simpson. The walking tour will pause at the sculpture dedicated to Simpson at Hopkins Green, installed shortly after her death in 2011. In 2018, the Washington & Lee Board of Trustees re-named one of its historic structures in her honor. Accordingly, Simpson House (now housing the offices of the Dean of the College) duly signals her status as the university's first tenured female professor, as well as her critical administrative role in chairing the Steering Committee for Co-Education in the mid-1980s.

After the tour finishes at Campbell House, in the downtown greenspace of its historic backyard gardens, walkers can rest on the memorial bench recently donated to witness Simpson's legacy as President of RHS, along with her other community commitments with Historic Lexington Foundation, Preservation Virginia, and Project Horizon.



***Pamela Hemenway Simpson, outside "The Castle," owned by RHS, site of its first meetings, oldest surviving building in Lexington, and one of many sites she proudly served, in advancing local architectural and historic preservation.***



Given the tour's larger spirit and specific circumstances, it's also worth noting that Simpson's 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership of RHS nicely complements and sustains the preservation efforts of one of RHS' central founders in 1939, Ruth McCulloch. McCulloch's own sidewalk paver, placed right outside the museum, also honors her role in helping establish the Blue Ridge Garden Club, and a women's literary club named "The Ignorance Club": both local organizations that are still thriving today.



*Ruth McCulloch, one of RHS' founders, 1939  
Author of 'Stories of Ole Lexington'*

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In organizing an afternoon dedicated to women's history — if complemented by the men who lived with them — Wilson also emphasizes that the content of the tour, and its opportunity for intergenerational group conversations, jointly look to the future: "While we certainly welcome all walkers on Sunday, we particularly encourage K-12 girls in this community to join, to learn, and to contribute. These profiles in female citizenship, leadership, creativity — complicated models though they all and always are — are still under-represented in textbooks, and often edged out of quick-paced curricula. Of course, we encourage their male classmates to come see the terrain and traditions in new light, as well, alongside their parents and grandparents."



***Executive Director Eric Wilson leads RHS' first 'themed' walking tour, Which centered on local African-American lives featured in The Righteous and Rascals of Rockbridge sidewalk pavers program. February 2017, partnered with Lexington's First Baptist Church.***

“As with most themes and topics RHS addresses, as a community-engaged, local history organization, this particular focus on gender frames timely, distinctive perspectives on the evolving conditions of years past. But we do so in part to more broadly educate our present perspectives, and to advance our considerations and commitments when looking to the future of Buena Vista, Lexington, Rockbridge, and our state and nation beyond.”

For more information, contact RHS via [RockbridgeHistory.org](http://RockbridgeHistory.org). For a wider range of the 60+ biographies inscribed into Lexington sidewalks, and available to browse online, see [RRRockbridge.org](http://RRRockbridge.org).