



Arlington Historical Society

Winter 2009
Newsletter

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Arlington Historical
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President's Column

In 2009, the Arlington Historical Society will celebrate the centennial of the Wright Brother's flights in Arlington in 1908-1909 with a new exhibit at the museum. We should also plan an event in recognition of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. Why you might ask? There are a few Arlington links to Lincoln such as his visit with troops at Fort Corcoran in Rosslyn in the summer of 1861 and the interment of Robert Lincoln and Abraham Lincoln II at Arlington National Cemetery. In addition, there are national events that are planned. We should be part of the national recognition. Your event ideas are always welcome.

Don't miss our Thursday, January 8, 2009, 7:00 p.m. membership meeting. The program is "Guarding The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier." A short history of this Arlington National Cemetery icon will be presented by Timothy Gerard who was stationed for 33 months as a tomb guard in Arlington. Mr. Gerard and current sentinels from the Old Guard at Ft. Myer will be present to discuss their training, the difficulties they encounter on guard duty and the symbolic meaning of the changing of the guard. The meeting will be at Arlington's Central Library auditorium on Quincy Street. Since our meeting time has been moved to 7:00 p.m., I encourage you to come early for light refreshments that will be catered by The Melting Pot and served before the beginning of the program. If you do not attend then that's more cheese, bread, apples, and chocolate for me. You can have the leftover carrots, if there are any.

It takes many hands to run our organization, to preserve the historic Ball-Sellers house, manage our museum, and conduct programs. I wish to thank the many persons who work or contribute funds to our cause. The list of volunteers and contributors is far too long to include here. We have much to be thankful for. While traveling around the east coast this summer I visited a number of museums and historic sites and observed that other organizations are not as fortunate as we are. In fact, some small museums and their affiliated organizations are folding. By contrast we own the land and building which houses our museum and we own our historic site. We are not in debt. We have sufficient revenue to run the society but we could always do more with additional funds. (For example we can always use more display cases!) We have a healthy membership base of about 400 members. Lastly, I think we are having some fun in sharing our quest for historical knowledge. With such a great bounty, let us strive to make 2009 as successful as past years.

George W. Dodge, President

Museum Building Update

Jennifer Sale

When cold weather came earlier than expected in November, our exterior painting project was delayed, but others are humming along. This fall, we began monthly building-wide pest control treatments after discovery of several cloth moth larvae in the textile storage room. So far, no additional clothe moths or other troublesome pests have been found.

In October, Chick Walter of the Grounds Committee coordinated the repaving of our museum parking lot, which was given a fresh layer of asphalt. The rusting rear guard rail was painted by Crystal City Rotary Club, led by former President and Arlington Ridge Civic Association neighbor George Tyson.

Inside the building, Arlington Ridge Civic Association President Dick Herbst has generously offered to build a much-needed wall partition on the second floor. With our collections consolidated and moved into the former office area, the former collections storage room will be freed up for potential use as exhibit space. Per the Americans with Disabilities Act, any exhibit will need to include companion materials for visitors who cannot access the stairs.

As soon as we have warmer weather (50-degree lows) in the spring, our general contractor, Commonwealth Restorations, will begin scraping, repairing, and repainting the windows. Phase II of the project will include painting of the gables and trim.

Parking Lot Restoration / Improvement

Chick Walter

In October, Museum neighbor Bonnie Flynn and I handled contractor restoration to the Museum parking lot. This consisted of cleaning and filling the many cracks in the asphalt, followed by slurry coating. Finally, another subcontractor team painted fresh

parking space lines, including the blue and white handicapped space marking. Combined with the local Rotary Club's repainting of the steel safety fence at the back of the lot, this makes arrival at the Museum seem a bit fresher. The Rotary Club effort was directed by local neighbor and Rotary past-President George Tyson.

Improper use of the lot has become largely a thing of the past, since George Dodge worked with a local tow company to put legally required warning signs up, and the Society and Arlington Ridge Civic Association put out a neighborly statement of parking policies, with an explanatory letter. We also have standing agreements with abutting and nearby neighbors to provide overflow parking for the few events each year that exceed capacity of the Museum lot.

News From Ball-Sellers

Marty Orth

Our resident for the past five years, Deirdre Palmer, has moved to be closer to her work. Three members of our committee, Dean Allard, Betty Vertiz, and Marty Orth interviewed four applicants and asked Emma Sky Wolf to become the new resident curator/caretaker.

Since it had been some years since we had worked on the inside of the house, we hired FOUR SEASONS PAINTING to spruce up. And what a wonderful job they have done! Another of the committee members, Bob Shannon, had recommended him. When you next need painting, call Eddie at Four Seasons, 703-421-7777. He does excellent work.



Fieldtrip Suggestions

Richmond

A day trip to Richmond might be just what you need to shake out the cabin fever of winter. Three exhibits at the Virginia Historical Society Museum sound interesting.

A Creative Dynasty: Four Generations of Virginia Women - until January 18, 2009 This exhibition explores the careers of four generations of Virginia women who spent their lives involved with the arts. Julia Anne Morrison Blount, an artist and musician who died in 1877, was the mother of Sallie Lee Blount Mahood, an accomplished painter who studied in Paris. Helen Mahood McGehee, daughter of Sallie, helped found the Tampa Art Institute and was a violist for the Tampa Symphony Orchestra. Her daughter, Helen McGehee Umaña, is a world renowned dancer, choreographer, and teacher. This exhibit includes paintings, drawings, photographs, video clips, and sculpture related to these talented women.

Photography in Virginia - until May 3, 2009 Photography has documented and interpreted life in Virginia for more than 150 years. A major photography exhibition will survey this visual record, using only work made in Virginia and presenting many images never before published or displayed. Included will be daguerreotypes, panoramas, amusement-park tintypes, lantern slides, photogravure, early experiments in color, and aerial photography.

Heads and Tales - until April 12, 2009 *Heads and Tales* presents portraits of five people with compelling personal stories - a woman who inspired the English poet Alexander Pope; a royal governor who was murdered by a mob; a Federalist politician struggling against the tide in Jeffersonian Virginia; a patron of the arts who made his fortune as a robber baron in the Gilded Age; and a Virginia suffragette, freethinker, and political radical. Their tales are told by analysis of components of their pictorially complex portraits.

The Virginia Historical Society, located at 428 N. Boulevard in Richmond, is open Monday-Saturday from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m. - 5 p.m. For more information, call (804) 358-4901 or visit www.vahistorical.org.

In Your Own Home

A great stay-at-home fieldtrip can be found on your own computer. On the Arlington County website, in the Library section, you'll find a section called "Our Back Pages: Stories, Scenes and Events From Arlington's Past". It's a great walk down Arlington's memory lane. There are dozens of photos and accompanying stories. No need to drive any where. No need to even put on your coat. Just make a warm drink and click away for a fun stay-at-home fieldtrip. Visit <http://www.co.arlington.va.us/departments/Libraries/history/LibrariesHistoryBackPagesIndex.aspx>.

Prestwould

One of America's finest historic sites, Prestwould, is located near Clarksville, Virginia overlooking Buggs Island Lake. The house was the home of Sir Peyton Skipwith and his family. The legacy of documentation left by the early Skipwiths is said to be the most complete and extensive of any non-political family in Colonial or Federal America. Prestwould was one of the largest and most complex gentry houses built during its time. The interior of the manor has large rooms, mostly furnished with Skipwith heirlooms. Some rooms still have original wallpaper that Lady Jean, Sir Peyton's second wife, ordered from England. The house, built of stone quarried on the plantation, was laid out in 1793 and finished in 1795. The interior of the home is best known for its original 18th and 19th century wallpapers.

Save this for a spring fieldtrip because it is open from mid April to the end of October. It's about a three and a half hour trip so this might be perfect for a weekend get away. Call 804-374-8672 for more information.

Textile Survey

The Society recently undertook a survey of its textile collection. The Society was fortunate to work with textile expert Julia Brennan. Three days were spent reviewing a portion of the collection. Julia has worked in the field of textile conservation for over twenty-five years. She serves private collectors, galleries, museums, and institutions. During her five years as Assistant Conservator for Exhibitions at the Textile Museum in Washington, she prepared over 30 exhibits, and was the guest curator of a contemporary textile show on Faith Ringgold. Julia frequently lectures to historical societies and collector groups on the care and display of textiles and costumes. She does regular contract work and maintenance of textile collections for The John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, The Daughters of the American Revolution Museum, George Washington's Mount Vernon and Smithsonian Institution Museums.

The following is from the report from Julia to the Board of Directors.

- ❖ The Society has over 4,000 physical artifacts in the collection. At the Hume School site, there are about 450 historic textile accessions. (More in overall number as some accessions have multiple items.) The collection is a wide assortment, representing personal clothing, clothing accessories, household and decorative textiles, flags, hooked rugs, and quilts. The collection ranges from the mid-1800's up to the 1960's. The largest part of the collection is women's, men's, and children's clothing and uniforms, numbering about 240 accessions. A majority of the personal clothing dates from the late-1800's through the mid-1900's. Overall, the textiles are a relatively large collection for a small organization.
- ❖ Most of the textiles have been donated by Arlington families, and members of the Historical Society. Some of the textiles have provenance to older Arlington families and founders of the Society. A majority of them are unsystematic donations, from multiple Arlington

residents over the past fifty years. Most of the textile items bear only the provenance that they were donated by Arlingtonians. On a piece by piece basis, some of the textiles are interesting and valuable historical examples of their type, but they do not represent any particular Arlington historical event or associations beyond local provenance.

- ❖ The three day on-site assessment of the textile collection was conducted from October 20th to 22nd, 2008. A third of the collection was examined from a conservation point of view. In addition, overall storage housings, materials, environmental conditions, and storage space were evaluated. The purpose of the survey was an evaluation of the overall conditions of the textile collection in order to establish a working baseline and blueprint for future preservation efforts.
- ❖ The survey covered a random sampling of the collection which was selected to represent the overall collection. The survey attempted to examine a range of conditions - from textiles in very poor condition to those in good condition.
- ❖ The collection overall is in fair condition. There has been minimal professional collections care over the last sixty years and at least two significant infestations. These factors combine to put the overall collection at risk from pests, environment, exposure, poor storage and handling. Based on the condition sampling of the collection, about 40% of the textiles need some sort of treatment, and 13% are in very poor condition and require extensive treatment. A systemized plan to properly upgrade the care of collections is a big challenge. It is particularly difficult without trained and consistent staff, and the commitment of adequate funds. In short, the responsible stewardship of a fairly large textile collection is a challenge and a potential burden to the Society.
- ❖ It is a large collection considering the size of the site and storage area. The current storage space upstairs appears too small to properly accommodate the entire textile collection properly housed, along with the other artifacts currently stored there.

Recommendations

- ❖ The collection is in need of a serious commitment to a systemized rehousing plan, and a long-term care and maintenance plan. All the textiles need rehousing, monitoring and reorganization in order to augment overall conditions.
- ❖ The textile collection is at risk from environmental factors.
- ❖ The most distinctive problem with the textile collection is simply a lack of care. There appears to be no organized program of collections maintenance in place. There is no trained collections manager charged with the tasks of maintaining and monitoring the collection. There is no professionally trained collections manager who can address the overall needs. In addition, there has not been much attention devoted to the interpretation or study of the textile collection. This means that it has been left alone, undisturbed, with undetected problems.
- ❖ The designated storage area for textiles and other artifacts appears over crowded. Large boxes are needed for delicate and fragile 19th century dresses and bodices, uniforms and quilts. Fragile items will need to be housed individually. Additional padding to prevent permanent creasing and splitting will expand the size of the textiles and, consequently, the overall storage needs. Proper rehousing will spread the overall collection out into more boxes, of different sizes, as well as some rolls. In addition, there needs to be a handling or work area adjacent to or within the storage area.
- ❖ Systemized rehousing requires a detailed plan, budget and the commitment of the Board and at least two people for implementation. It is time consuming and exacting work. Many items need to be carefully vacuumed to remove insect carcasses and dust. Cloth accession tags and registration/catalogue records should be fully updated in the process. ID photographs of the item should be placed in sleeves on the outside of the boxes for easy identification.

- ◆ The most critical first step is to continue a comprehensive Integrated Pest Management Policy and tackle current infestation.
- ◆ The second most important step is the implementation of a sound Collections Maintenance Policy. In order to implement a collections action plan, it is advisable to consider hiring a collections manager, with experience and training for a period of a year.
- ◆ As part of the Collections Maintenance Policy, the first task is to properly rehouse the collection of 450 items.
- ◆ A first step in the Collections Maintenance Policy is a thorough cleaning of all the storage and display spaces. Floors need to be cleaned with Lysol and alcohol to combat the infestation. This first overall cleaning will take time to do well. But after that, maintenance of these spaces will be more manageable.
- ◆ Increase the signage and education of visitors so that conservation concerns are part of the visitor experience. Audiences are much more sympathetic to limited access and security if they are involved in the process.
- ◆ For long-term preservation, it is recommended to explore the option of off site storage. If the collections could be transferred to a fully operative storage facility, the daily care burden would be lifted from the Society.
- ◆ The deaccessioning of artifacts needs to be considered as well.
- ◆ Make a five year and ten year projected plan for treatment priorities.
- ◆ Devote curatorial expertise to study and publish catalogues of significant aspects of the collections.
- ◆ Allocate sufficient funds to develop acceptable conservation standards for the exhibits.

Mark Your Calendar

◆ **Thursday, January 8, 2009 - 7:00 p.m. - “Guarding The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.” Arlington Historical Society Meeting - Central Library Auditorium - A short history of this Arlington National Cemetery icon will be presented by Timothy Gerard who was stationed for 33 months as a tomb guard in Arlington.**

Saturday, January 24, 2009, 12:00 p.m. - 3 p.m. - Civil War Forts Van Tour: Forts of North Arlington, Ages 12 to adult. Register children and adults; children must be accompanied by a registered adult. - Union fortifications in North Arlington were built to protect Washington and the bridges across the Potomac River. The tour will begin at Fort. C.F. Smith and travel by van to Forts Bennett, Ethan Allen and finally Fort Marcy in Fairfax County. Learn about the men and equipment stationed at the forts and the reasons behind each fort’s location. Dress for the weather. Walking will be on mostly flat unpaved surfaces. Meet at Fort C. F. Smith Park, 2411 N. 24th St., Arlington, VA 22207. \$10 fee payable on the day of the program. Reservation required. Register online <https://registration.arlingtonva.us/vsiwebtrac.html> or call 703-228-4747.

Saturday, February 21, 2009, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. - Fredericksburg Battlefield Tour - Adults. In the winter of 1862 the Union Army attempted to defeat entrenched Confederates at Fredericksburg. The result was one of Robert E. Lee’s greatest victories. The visit to this National Park will follow the course of the battle. The van will leave from the Lubber Run Center parking lot, 300 N. Park Dr., Arlington, VA 22203. \$20 fee payable on the day of the program. Reservation required. Register online <https://registration.arlingtonva.us/vsiwebtrac.html> or call 703-228-4747.

Saturday, February 21, 2009, 1 p.m. - 2 p.m. - Hanssen Spy Tour - Adults - The infamous spy and

traitor Robert Hanssen worked in secrecy all around the nation’s Capitol for years before being discovered. Some of those clandestine affairs were conducted in the woods of Long Branch Nature Center. Join this tour to unfold the dramatic story of this notorious spy, the damage he caused our nation, and his eventual downfall and arrest, including the FBI’s nature center operations. You may have read the books or seen the movies, but hear the untold story of what has now become part of Long Branch history. Meet at Long Branch Nature Center, 625 S. Carlin Springs Rd., Arlington, VA 22204. \$4 fee payable on the day of the program. Reservation required. Register online <https://registration.arlingtonva.us/vsiwebtrac.html> or call 703-228-4747.

◆ **Thursday, March 12, 2009 - 7:00 p.m. - Arlington Historical Society Meeting - Central Library Auditorium - Topic to be determined. Mark your calendar.**

Wednesday, April 29, 2009 - America on the Eve of the Civil War - Robins Center, University of Richmond in Richmond, Virginia. See details on next page.

◆ **Thursday, May 14, 2009 - 7:00 p.m. - Arlington Historical Society Meeting - Central Library Auditorium - Topic to be determined. Mark your calendar.**

Wednesday, May 27, 2009 7:30 pm - “Mary Surratt: An American Tragedy” presented by the Alexandria Historical Society. This lecture is in commemoration of the Bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln. Elizabeth Steger Trindal, author of *Mary Surratt: An American Tragedy*, will tell the controversial story of Mary Surratt, who was hanged for the assassination of Lincoln. Ms. Trindal contends that Mary Surratt, who was educated in Alexandria, was innocent. The event is at the The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria, VA Free. Open to the public. No reservations needed.

“America on the Eve of the Civil War”

April 29, 2009 - 8:45 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. - Robins Center, University of Richmond

Register today for the first in a series of annual Signature Conferences sponsored by the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission. Dr. Edward L. Ayers will bring together nationally-recognized Civil War historians for an open dialogue about the state of the country in 1859. What was happening two years before the firing of the first shots in the nation’s deadliest conflict? What did people know and what were they thinking? Could they possibly have imagined the horror that was to come?

“America on the Eve of the Civil War” brings a fresh perspective on enduring issues. The program will be conducted in an interactive format with speakers from varied perspectives. Akin to news programs like “Face the Nation” and “Meet the Press,” speakers will discuss events of 1859 and their effect, limiting themselves only to what would have been known at that time.

The focus of the conference will be the situation in the United States in what turned out to be the eve of the Civil War, including central events and changes of the late antebellum era. Scheduled topics include:

Taking Stock of the Nation in 1859

The United States is completing the most exhaustive census in its history and striking patterns are emerging. All parts of the country are booming, with rapid growth in the Northeast, South, and West. Are the regions becoming more integrated, though, or divergent? Will politics calm in the midst of this growth or continue to

be stirred up? Will religion and reform flourish or be smothered by prosperity?

The Future of Virginia and the South

The year of 1859 saw the slave-based economy of the South at an all-time peak. Slaves have never been worth more, cotton has never been worth more, and the slave-based economy of the upper South has never been more diversified or valuable. Will these trends continue?

Making Sense of John Brown’s Raid

The most electrifying event of 1859 was John Brown’s raid on the armory at Harpers Ferry. Virginia’s execution of Brown seems to have galvanized the North, but many white Northerners, including the Republicans, refuse to endorse Brown or his tactics. The long-term effects of the raid are unclear.

Predictions for the Election of 1860

Taking stock of the potential candidates in each of the two major parties, panelists will determine who has the best chance of winning the nomination and the general election. There is turmoil among the Democrats, the new Republican Party shows considerable strength, and strong Southern-rights advocates are calling for radical change, so predicting a winner may be difficult.

This day-long conference is free to the public, but seating is limited so plan to register early. Call (804) 786-3591 or visit <http://www.vacivilwar.org/2009conference.php> for more information.

Thursday, January 8, 2009 - 7:00 p.m.

“Guarding The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.”

Arlington Historical Society Meeting - Central Library Auditorium

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Arlington, VA 22210

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Arlington Historical Museum

1805 S. Arlington Ridge Road
Open Saturdays & Sundays
1:00 - 4:00 p.m., Free
Come visit our permanent exhibits on
the 200+ year history of the county.



Ball Sellers House

5620 South Third Street
Open Saturdays, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
April through October with special
events scheduled during this time.
There is no admission fee, but a
donation is appreciated.
You may also arrange a visit by calling
703-379-2123.
<http://www.arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org>

Arlington Historical Museum Now on Exhibit

Antique Cameras and An Arlington Wedding - 1905



This photo was taken during the recent textile survey.
Pictured are items from a Saegmuller wedding, including a shoe,
crocheted basket, name card, tie and gloves.