Greetings to our MHA Membership!

As we reach the end of 2021, our hopes are high for 2022. Our target for our first dinner meeting of 2022 is March. We will attend to the advice of the medical community to protect the health and safety of our members. Watch the February History Calendar for further details. As we mentioned in the last issue, the Voices From The Past event is tentatively scheduled for April of 2022 with a final decision to be made by March 1, 2022. Again, watch the February History Calendar for details.

The Hugh Torance House and Store in Huntersville has a new look and a new approach. Our current schedule is to be open weekly on Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 with guided tours at 1:00 and 3:00. We will be closed for the next six weeks while we do some further upgrades and training. Our programs will resume in February.

As we restart our various programs, we need your help. Many of our reliable docents still need to be extremely cautious so we are in great need of new supporters. As we take on more programming, we need more paid members and donations. We need your help spreading the word about MHA and your attendance at the many historic sites and events you see in our History Calendar. Please go to our website at meckdec.org to join, to volunteer, and to find the latest History Calendar.

It takes the whole history community to keep the history of Mecklenburg County available to our families and our descendants. Please do your part.
**MHA Dinner Meetings**

We are sorry to announce that we have postponed our meetings due to concerns around Covid for our repeat attendees. We will revisit the possibility of in person meetings in January.

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**MHA Dandelion Newsletter Editor**

We Found Our Editor!!

For the one-year term of 2022, Robert Ryals has volunteered to serve as editor of both the History Calendar and the MHA Dandelion Newsletter. Robert is a well-known figure in the Revolutionary reenactment community. Maybe you have seen him read the Mecklenburg Declaration somewhere in the last two years. To appreciate how deep his background in history is, here is his related bio.

Robert Ryals is a public historian who holds a Master of Science degree in Library and Information Studies, and, a Master of Arts degree, both from Florida State University. He worked at Florida State University as the Curator for the Claude and Mildred Pepper Library and Museum for five years before moving to the Charlotte-area in 2009. He was employed as a Special Projects Librarian at the York County Library and as a Reference Librarian/Audio-Visual Archivist at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, SC. He has been actively involved in historical interpretation and re-enacting since 2001, beginning as a living history docent at Spanish sites in Tallahassee and St. Augustine, FL. In 2009 his focus as an historical interpreter shifted to the Southern Theater of the American Revolution (1780-1782).

He has participated in several historical re-enactments of that era in the Carolinas and Virginia. His current and previous experience as a docent and interpretive program guide assistant includes Historic Brattonsville, the Ft. Mill History Museum, the Museum of the Waxhaws, the Charlotte Museum of History, and the Torrance House and Store. He has also delivered interpretive talks on topics about Charlotte’s colonial period before civic and social groups in the Charlotte area on behalf of the MHA. In 2016 he created an abbreviated, hour-long walking tour of the Charlotte Liberty Walk and leads guided tours on behalf of the Mecklenburg Historical Association (MHA).

He has performed in various historic scenarios at Historic Brattonsville and has written, edited, and delivered scripted historic scenarios. He created the interpretive persona of Dr. Ephraim Brevard for the first annual MHA “Voices from the Past” program and performed public readings of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence at the Charlotte Museum of History and at the Mec Dec Day Celebration in Uptown Charlotte. Also, he serves as a board member of the Mecklenburg Historical Association and as a board member of the Mecklenburg Militia Revolutionary War historic reenactment group.

If you need to contact him, his email is ryalsr@gmail.com.

Thank you, Robert!
From the Docent Co-Chairs

Message from the Co Chair – Janet Dyer

When I agreed to be Docent co-chair for 2019-2020, I never imagined that a pandemic would interrupt our lives. The Docent Board went from business as usual in 2019 – planning the next Voices From the Past, lining up speakers for our monthly meetings, organizing the Docent library, planning to celebrate our 30th anniversary as MHA Docents, etc. – to speculating when we would ever get to see each other in person again. We even agreed to serve an additional year as board members because of the pandemic.

Many thanks to Valerie Jones who, in addition to her duties as treasurer, became our Zoom master and made it possible for the Docents to meet online. Thanks to Jane Estep, Vice Chair, who found interesting speakers willing to present their programs via Zoom. Thanks to Secretary Linda Beverly for her accurate recording of our minutes. She went beyond expectations when she creatively took minutes while listening on her phone when she was in Cary, NC and the rest of the Board was meeting in person at Barbara’s house. Carolyn Dilda, Hospitality Chair, waited patiently from March 2020 through most of 2021 for the Docents to be able to meet in person again so she could resume her duties – from nothing to a successful Docent tea in December.

The annual Docent tea was a great success thanks to many Docents working together. Thanks to Carolyn Dilda (hospitality organizer), Jane Estep (arranging for our speaker, organizing Toys for Tots, decorating tables), Valerie Jones (tea brewer extraordinaire), Susie Worcester (providing round table clothes, teaspoons and other supplies), Barbara Jackson and Linda Beverly (decorating among other duties). Thanks to Alice Bostic for the use of her sleigh as a table decoration. Mark Dappert is not only a gentleman but an expert dishwasher. Thanks Mark. Thanks to Jack Jones and Paul Estep for providing much needed manpower and behind the scenes support. Thanks to Robert Ryals, our tech support in 18th century clothing, who set up the computer/projector/screen for our speaker and figured out why the microphone wasn’t working. Thanks to Larry Mellichamp who saved the day with his spare batteries for the microphone. Of course, thanks to all our Docents who provided food, toys and fellowship.

Special thanks to Barbara Jackson, best co-chair ever. She and I had many phone conversations over the last three years and really got to know each other. Many times we could only laugh because we didn’t know the answer to, “What do we do now?”

Sadly, we also said goodbye to dear friends Ann and Jim Williams and Wanda Hubicki. They were each such an important part of the Docents and the history community. They will always be a part of us.

Challenging times can inspire us to new ideas and new ways. The Docents have evolved and stepped up to meet new challenges over the last 30th years and will continue to do so as we share our love of history with each other and the history community. Congratulations to the 2022-2023 MHA Docent Board.

A Co-Chair’s End of Term Message

Mecklenburg Historical Association is our parent organization. Did you know that it was formed in October, 1954? James A. Steinhouse was elected president of the group which was actually the second such association. The first Mecklenburg Historical Society had been formed in 1875 but was defunct by 1954. The new organization was presented with the constitution and by-laws of the original Society.

Do you remember when the docent component was included in the MHA? The MHA Docents plan a celebration to be held during the March MHA meeting. You will learn the answer to that question and many other interesting facts about the docents. Our upcoming newsletter will give you information regarding date and time of the meeting.
Covent-19 has influenced our lives in incredible ways. It caused an unprecedented 3 year term of office for the current board. The past three years created a bond which nourished friendships and kept the docent program functioning. We were able to have our monthly meetings and board meetings through the labor of Valerie and Zoom. Did you know that two board members, Carolyn Dilda and Linda Beverly now live 100 miles from Charlotte? Nevertheless, both carried out their responsibilities every month before and during the pandemic? Did you know that Valerie has served as treasurer for 19 years? She can tell you how every penny has been spent for various programs, excursions, and events. Her reports are embellished with graphics, accuracy and humor. We cannot adequately express our gratitude to her for her excellent service. Jane Estep was vice-chair and responsible for our programs. We had varied and interesting programs because Jane has a deep interest in furniture, crafts, textiles, and I could continue through the arts. Then there was Janet Dyer! She is a co-author and an author. She has enough resource material in notebooks to write a few more books about the people, places, and history of Mecklenburg, past and present. You can see what an incredible experience I had in working with these remarkable women. June White, greeter and photographer, and Sarah Sue Hardinger, publisher, complete the list of women who worked diligently in your behalf. I must mention that our December Tea was successful through the help of the many volunteers who came early to set-up and stayed late to clean-up. Thank you all.

Our docent program will have new leaders for 2022-2023. I extend congratulations to them and wish them success and joy as they carry out the tasks of leadership of the MHA Docents.

Best wishes to all,
Barbara McCray Jackson

NOTE: The MHA Docents are pleased to announce that Barbara Taylor will be treasurer for 2022. Barbara is a well-known member of the history community. Her leadership has afforded success for many historic sites and organizations. We are indebted to her for assuming this new responsibility. Docents should remit dues to her at a meeting or by mailing them to her home. Her address is on the Docent Roster.

**Thoughts from the new Chair**

*Across the water*

I traveled across the water by ferry to a Sea Island off the South Carolina coast. Daufuskie Island. A Gullah island.

Once on the island, I traveled by golf cart or walked; no private cars are permitted here. The island is a world apart from the mainland. The Gullah people settled here after the Civil War and sustained their life by living off the land and sea. They continued their West African ways in this isolation, surrounded by water.

These people were descendants of slaves brought to the Carolinas from the ‘Rice Coast’ of West Africa where their rice knowledge and skill created the rice plantations in America.

On Daufuskie, rice was grown only for their own use. Indigo, then later Sea Island cotton, were the commercial crops. Later, in the 1890s, oysters were harvested, shucked and shipped all over the world. Until the 1950s, the oysters were good but then they were killed by the runoff pollution from Savannah and surrounding area. The Gullah began to leave the island to find work on the mainland.

Now very few Gullah live on the island. Gated communities have come to the ends of the island. Air b and b are abundant. The island is not so wild now but to our eye, it still gives that appearance.

The author Pat Conroy came to Daufuskie Island in 1969. He saw the wild of the island and the Gullah way of life. For one year, he taught the children about life and their place in the world. He found their knowledge so lacking. Other teachers were demanding manners and disciplined by the ‘stick’. Pat could not do such discipline but taught them about geography, music, travel, the alphabet, and to read!
His ‘rebel’ ways got him fired after that year but he went on to write ‘The water is wide’ about his experience on the island. That book and the Hallmark movie on it should be in everyone’s historical knowledge. To see the movie on line, goggle ‘The water is wide’, Hallmark movie [about 1 ½ hours]. Your life will be enriched by doing so.

History has been on my mind during these 2 years of Covid. The exploration of Daufuskie Island was part of my research.

What was on your mind during this time? There is so much history to explore. Will you share your thoughts with Docents?

Giving Thanks

I am grateful for the current board who lasted for 3 years and carried Docents through these hard times of Covid, zoom, the lost of both Williams and their Dandelion. We have made it though not to the other side but still traveling toward it with the new board coming on.

I am thankful for my new board. These ladies have stepped forward to keep Docents afloat. We still face challenges with getting together and socializing, coping with new Covid strains, keeping the Dandelion coming, and working with the MHA treasurer since no one stepped forward to do that job.

But our goal remains the same—to keep history alive within us and our community.

Preparing for the year ahead

The new Docent board [Audrey, Lynn, Holly, Susie] will have the annual Retreat on Jan. 17. All committee reports are due by Jan. 10 to Audrey by email attachment. Requests for monies from our budget are also due by Jan. 10.

On our minds will be the new budget and how to handle the treasurer’s job, organizing the Dandelion, the 30th Anniversary celebration in March, Voices from the Past in April, and printing the new passport booklet.

Anything else? Contact Audrey (lmellichamp@carolina.rr.com).

MHA Docent Programs

MHA Docents General Meetings
Fellowship Hall at Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church
9:30 AM

It’s time again to hand over the gavel to a new Docent Board of Directors. On January 4, 2022, following the Installation of the new officers, we can discuss past programs, ideas for future programs, and field trips. If a vacancy still needs to be filled, please consider volunteering. The outgoing Board has thoroughly enjoyed the times we’ve spent together planning our activities and will be happy to assist at any time.

The general meeting of MHA Docents will be Feb. 1, 2022 at Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church in the fellowship hall at 11am. The business meeting will be at 10am. Masks are required indoors.
We have a special guest that will join us in celebrating Black History Month. Michael Connor is a professional speaker and performer of African-American history. (He is also one of my very talented Voices From The Past portrayers.)

Michael will tell us about James Walker Hood, a very interesting African-American that lived in North Carolina during and after the Civil War. He will then go into first-person and reenact a “debate” about the history and future of the Confederate monuments.

The March general meeting of MHA Docents will be March 1, 2022 at Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church in the fellowship hall at 11am. The business meeting will be at 10am. Masks are required indoors.

Continuing with our monthly history lessons, the program for March will be celebrating Women in History. And, how better to learn more about four of Mecklenburg’s amazing ladies than by our own Voices From The Past portrayers. If you have not had the opportunity to hear their stories being told in Elmwood and Pinewood cemeteries then join us for an enjoyable and educational program. And, as I have often said about VFTP, I know we have done a good job when our guests would exclaim “wow I didn’t know that!”
History News
News, thoughts and bits of history since we were last together.

Matthews Heritage Museum Extends Time
The Matthews Heritage Museum’s current exhibit is *It’s About Time: An exhibit of Clocks and Watches.* The exhibit will be on display until January 22, 2022.

A variety of watches on display include Bulova, Swatch, Seiko and a myriad of others. Examples of dive watches, wooden watches, and racing watches will also be on display. Does your child wear a “character” watch? Check out our character watches including Mickey Mouse, Cinderella, M & M, Goofy and Hop-a-long Cassidy! Goofy’s dial is backward and his hands run counter clockwise! Shelf and mantle clocks, from the 1840s forward will also be on display. A popular American banjo clock, a cuckoo clock, and a couple of Seth Thomas clocks are featured. This exhibit will be on display thru the holidays, ending on January 22, 2022. The Museum is located at 232 N. Trade Street, Matthews. Hours of operation are Thursday to Saturday from 10 to 4:30 p.m. Admission charged, except for the first Saturday of every month.

Dedication of Roseland Cemetery
On a picture perfect day a number of citizens gathered to unveil a sign at Roseland Cemetery, an African American burial site just off Monroe Road. In 2017 the Taft Development Group purchased the property for development but promised to care for the graveyard. After years of neglect, many wanted this historic site to be refurbished and preserved. This long-forgotten spot where former slaves and African Americans are buried was cleaned up by a group of volunteers led by Hoke Thompson, a former Eagle Scout, in February and March 2021. Taft provided dumpsters and extra topsoil to fill in gravesite depressions, and installed a fence around the cemetery perimeter. The Matthews Heritage Museum did research on the cemetery, tracking who was buried there. After several months, we have a list of 61 names of individuals who are buried there, though most do not have stones (list soon to be found on the Matthews Heritage Museum site). The earliest known burial dates to 1916 when Calvin Henry Boyd, first minister and founder of Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church was laid to rest. The last known burial dates to 1957 when Reginald Leon McMurray was buried there as an infant. We believe 10 or 11 former slaves are among those buried there. It is a lovely peaceful place to take a stroll and learn a bit of history, located at the rear of the new complex “The Address Galleria Apartments”.

Traveling Archivist Program
The Matthews Heritage Museum applied to the Traveling Archivist Program earlier this year to preserve the collection of Massey Papers and was selected to participate. The program is supported by the State Archives of NC, the NC Digital Heritage Center, and UNC-Greensboro and allows us to have the collection scanned, digitized and placed on Digital NC. The collection had already been inventoried by the museum staff and
volunteers. The collection includes approximately 700 documents including photos of family members, receipts from purchases and taxes, and around 70 letters written by family members to Dr. Massey. These documents have provided insight into the original configuration of the house, as built, and to the date it was constructed. In the first years that we owned these items the docents and staff transcribed the letters, creating a typed copy of all of them, and then placed the originals in chronological order.

We decided that only the letters, certain important receipts, and photographs would be digitized. Half of the documents have now been scanned and were returned in early November. The second half of the collection was picked up. The first documents can be accessed online at https://lib.digitalnc.org. Click on “Contributors” and then on the Matthews Heritage Museum. We hope they will be of value to the historic community.

_Hugh Torance House and Store Completes 4Q21_

Hugh Torance House and Store has been open for 13 straight weeks. For sites with paid staff this is expected but for a small site maintained completely by volunteers, this is quite a feat. Actually, we started in mid-August as a soft open for the 1st Mecklenburg Militia’s private fall gathering. It was fabulous to see the site filled with people in period correct clothing doing period appropriate tasks.

We opened to the public in September building slowly toward a special event at the end of October. On Friday evening, the Charlotte Area Paranormal Society hosted an evening of looking for evidence of paranormal activity in and around the property. The way this group uses high-tech equipment to detect even small changes in temperature, to sense motion, and even to generate words that may relate to the surroundings.

During the day on Saturday, we had a celebration of the colonial spirit of All Hallows Eve. We had old-fashioned games, pumpkin painting, a magnificent storyteller to relate the origins of many Halloween traditions, a short “haunted trail” for the little ones, and, of course, tours of the house and store complete with a spinner upstairs.

Starting with December 5, we had a small program each Sunday that related to a colonial Christmas. On the 5th, we cut greens and decorated the four main windows. On the 12th, we made corn shuck dolls. On the 19th, we pushed whole cloves into the skin of juicy oranges and the whole building had the fragrance that could only be Christmas. On the 26th, we will set the formal parlor for dinner, put out lovely food, and display the toys and gifts that would be appropriate to a well-off family in the backcountry in 1810.

As we move into 2022, we will take off a few weeks to continue some upgrades we started last summer and to train some new volunteers. Please contact Sarah Sue Hardinger (sarahsuenc@gmail.com  704-906-6656) if you would like to join the party!
MHA Funding of Williams Collection

Earlier this year, MHA collected contributions to support an intern to catalog the papers of Jim and Ann Williams. We lost these two long-time members of MHA in 2020, Ann in January and Jim in December. They had both been involved in local history for decades. Ann or Ann and Jim together had written several books on the Torance and Davidson families. The research for these books as well as a great deal more documentation was gathered from their home last December and donated to J. Murrey Atkins Library at UNCC.

The intern was hired at the beginning of the fall semester and has recently completed the work. Jim had already donated some papers before he died. After examining those as well as those donated by the family, a great deal of the work was from Ann. The collection is named for both of them. At the bottom of the Atkins Library home page, you will find an article about the collection: https://library.charlotte.edu/archives-rare-books.

Dawn Schmidt of Atkins Library said, “This internship allowed us to make processing this collection a priority, and of course we couldn't have done it without the support of folks from the MHA and the Trail of History board.” Tony Zeiss, former President of Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC), echo this sentiment, “I think it is wonderful when two organizations can agree to partner on good causes thereby increasing their capabilities.”

An online guide to the collection is available, and the Ann and Jim Williams papers are open for research in the Dalton Reading Room on the 10th floor of J. Murrey Atkins Library (see hours). A researcher is already scheduled to come in and use the collection next week!

Rosedale Member Appreciation Day

Cold but sunny weather greeted the hardy individuals who attended the first Friends of Historic Rosedale Member Appreciation Day on November 6. Ample refreshments were provided by our Membership Committee chaired by Margaret Glover Schrimsher. Heaters generously on loan from The Comet Grill along with a roaring fire in our Pavilion fireplace helped to spread warmth among the attendees. Garden Tours and an overview of our Haunted History program were provided by staff. We offer a huge thank you to Andrea Mumm, Charlotte Symphony harpist, who donated her time and talent to provide amazing music for the afternoon.

The day ended with the dedication of the Ann and Jim Williams Lending Library. The Library honors the Williams' many contributions to Historic Rosedale. Members may borrow books and the general public may utilize books on site. Relevant book donations will be accepted and greatly appreciated. We were fortunate to have all three of the Williams' children, Jim, Doug, and Scotty Reiss, present. It was an nice opportunity to express memories of Ann and Jim.

Additionally, a wonderful “reunion” of sorts happened when Rosedale Board Member and MHA Docent Co-Chair Barbara Jackson took photos holding hands with the Williams children. The cover of Anne’s book “The Uncommon Bond of Julia and Rose”, features Ann and Barbara grasping hands; it was special to see the Williams children and Barbara recreating this moment.
The Battle of Camden Revolutionary War Reenactment, held Nov. 13/14, was an outstanding success by all accounts. Southern Campaign 1780 (SoCam), (a 501(c)3 non-profit that holds the annual event and provides year-round Rev. War educational programs), demonstrated positive growth to deliver a memorable event for reenactors, spectators, and the larger Revolutionary War community.

Dr. Tray Dunaway, SoCam Board Chair, related, “last year, Tom Oblak, (Vice Chair and Event Coordinator), and I were approached by the reenactor, merchant, and demonstrator organizers about changing their venue from Historic Camden to a new location but because this decision was reached four months before the event, we just had time to scramble to pull it off. This year we had an entire year to plan for the event and having the National Event designation by the Continental Line made a huge difference.”

“We had a 45% increase in Demonstrators and Merchants and an 18% increase in Military Reenactors,” Oblak said, “and because this was our second event, we could expand on the foundation we created last year. This was the largest Rev. War reenactment in the area since the 1970’s. We were very gratified to see the growth and the increased public participation.”

Over 3,000 visitors came to see the event over the weekend. Before the open-to-the-public Saturday and Sunday event, SoCam had their second annual Education Day, a free-of-charge by invitation-only event that hosts school groups from Kershaw County and surrounding counties. Sheri Davis, Education Director, said “Because of Covid restrictions, we had no participation from public or private schools. However, we still had about 750 students attend who are home-schooled.” Volunteer reenactors, merchants, and demonstrators set up over 50 educational stations for an all-Friday event. Interested school groups may receive an invitation to attend by simply registering in advance.
Many new features this year enhanced the expanded experience. The 24-acre battlefield, (separate from the encampments and merchant and demonstrator areas), boasted bleacher seating and a narrated interpretation over a PA system. After the Saturday afternoon battle reenactment, the United States Marine Corps, (a 2021 sponsor), held a swearing in ceremony for new recruits and received a musket salute from hundreds of reenactors. The Marsh Tacky Association, (the breed of horses favored by General Francis Marion), brought some beautiful Marsh Tackys to introduce them to the public.

New this year to the event was a pet project of Tray Dunaway, Rev. War Partner Row. Dunaway said, “We wanted to give Revolutionary War organizations and institutions the chance to leverage our event, which obviously attracts people who have an interest in Rev. War, to have a public outreach opportunity.” The SCDAR, SCSAR, SCCAR, SC 250th Rev War Anniversary Commission, SC Battleground Preservation Trust, Southern Rev. War Institute, Liberty Trail, Historyman Podcasts, Old English District Tourism, Camden Archives, Camden Rev. War Visitors Center, Historic Camden, Charleston’s Powder Magazine, and the Colonial Dames of America all set up displays along the public entrance to meet and greet. Many of the organizations have already requested a return for next year.

“One of our big pushes this year was to have increased public awareness and community support. We bring in tourism to our county and wanted to let local merchants participate so we produced the ‘Rev. War Restaurant Rendezvous,’ to promote local restaurants and to give participants a discounted meal.” Dunaway said. Over 30 local restaurants offered at least a 10% discount if patrons showed up in 18th Century(-ish!) dress on the Friday before the reenactment. It brought a lot of smiles and Facebook features of the restaurants in the run up to the event. Also attending this year’s reenactment were film crews for two feature films about the Revolution and two SC ETV shows.

The organizers are already planning for next year. Traditionally, the event has been the first weekend of November but this year it was moved to the second weekend. Oblak related, “The Continental Line was so impressed after our first year, they voted to make this one of two National Reenactments for 2021 but it would require a shift to the second weekend of November because of a conflicting WWI reenactment event.” Because the National Event designation cannot be repeated for two consecutive years, the organizers have not determined what weekend, first or second, the event will be held for 2022. Details and future plans can be found online on Facebook, (search for “southern campaign 1780”), or SoCam’s website, SouthernCampaign1780.org. Organizers may be reached by email at info@SC1780.org.
“Preserving Mecklenburg’s Heritage”

Mecklenburg Historical Association
Post Office Box 35032
Charlotte, North Carolina 28235

VISIT US ONLINE
WWW.MECKDEC.ORG

Membership Renewals

If you have not renewed your MHA membership for 2021, you can do so now. Fill in the form, make your check payable to Mecklenburg Historical Association, and mail to:

Mecklenburg Historical Association
Post Office Box 35032
Charlotte, North Carolina 28235

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