

For May – August
April 29, 2021
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Newsletter of the
*Mecklenburg Historical
Association and MHA Docents*

Spreading Knowledge of our History Like the Seeds of a Dandelion
<http://www.meckdec.org/>

Look Inside this Issue:

- [Main Title Article](#)
- [From the President](#)
- [From the Docent Co-Chairs](#)
- [MHA Docent Programs](#)
- [History News](#)
- [History Calendar](#)

Submission for this newsletter should be sent to
sarahsuenc@gmail.com. Deadline for September –
October Newsletter is August 25.



From the President

Linda Dalton

There is light at the end of the tunnel. In-person events are happening, always meeting safety guidelines. Historical sites are slowly opening. The last year has taught us how to enjoy presentations and meetings virtually. Indications are that future events will often be available both virtually and in-person allowing people who are distant or find attending outdoor events difficult the opportunity to indulge in their interest in history. Out of adversity comes invention.

This lengthy time of being shut down has also given some sites the opportunity to do maintenance and upgrades. Case in point is the Hugh Torance House and Store on Gilead Road in Huntersville. The Andrew Roby General Construction Company has begun work on repairing or replacing the wood that has decayed. The Torance Board is seeking funding to follow these repairs with a fresh coat of paint. Further changes are underway inside and around the building to more fully interpret the years 1780, 1785 and 1805 for three generations of the Hugh Torance family and the few enslaved people who were on the property.

You are invited to become a docent for this site as we open this summer. If you would like to know more about this opportunity, contact Sarah Sue Hardinger, the Lead Docent at 704-906-6656 or sarahsuenc@gmail.com. We are also looking for in-kind donations of home and store goods appropriate to a rustic cabin of 1780, a trader/farmer of 1790, or a prosperous merchant 1810.

Keep an eye out for the History Calendar that comes to you every other Friday. Please support our organizations and sites as they emerge from a most difficult time and throw open their doors to the history loving public.

IF YOU HAVE NOT RENEWED YOUR MHA MEMBERSHIP, PLEASE DO SO NOW.



Adventures in Docenting

Janet Dyer

Years ago, the upper floor of the Hezekiah Alexander spring house was used to display and interpret the process of turning fiber into cloth. Processing flax was explained with displays of flax in its various stages of being processed along with the necessary tools –a flax break, a scutching board and knife, and hackles. Wool and wool cards were available to demonstrate processing that fiber. If you had been trained (most of us by Ann Williams, of course), you were allowed to actually use the spinning wheel and the loom instead of just talking about them.

The loom work properly. The spinning wheel, however, was “bewitched.” It would spin beautifully for long periods of time (usually while there were no visitors around) and then, suddenly, (in front of said visitors) fall apart. During one memorable third grade tour, everything was going smoothly – the spinning wheel, my interpretation, holding the attention of the students – and then the wheel just fell apart! It had happened to me before so I wasn’t totally surprised but my third graders were horrified. “You broke it,” I heard. “We won’t tell.”

I thanked them but explained that the spinning wheel wasn’t really broken. As I put it back together, I explained that because the wheel was a bit warped the drive band would eventually slip off causing the rest of the assembly (called the mother-of-all) to come apart. I’m still not totally sure they believed that I didn’t break the spinning wheel in spite of my explanation and I am still not sure that the spinning wheel was not “bewitched”.

In Memoriam – Jim Williams

Randell Jones

In February 2018, “Thomas Jefferson,” skillfully interpreted by the renowned Bill Barker of Colonial Williamsburg for 26 years (and at Monticello since 2019), came to Charlotte to speak at the President’s Day Dinner sponsored by the Mecklenburg Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution.

MHA’s Favorite Son Jim Williams portraying Mecklenburg’s own “Thomas Polk” took the opportunity to school Mr. Jefferson on some phrases he might like to use should he decide to pen at some future date a similar declaration for all the rebelling colonies as Mecklenburg had done already. The exchange was witnessed by Ann Williams who may well have put “Thomas Polk” up to the whole escapade.

Jim and Ann are dearly missed and held close in our warmest thoughts and treasured memories.

In gratitude.



--Photo and tribute by Randell Jones, Winston-Salem

MeckDec Day is On!

The 246th Anniversary of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence will be celebrated on Thursday May 20, 2021 at 12:00 noon.

This year's celebration will be held at Victoria Yards, 408 N Tryon St, Charlotte, NC 28202. Plan to come out and celebrate this annual commemoration in Charlotte. The MeckDec celebration has hosted four former Presidents (Taft, Wilson, Eisenhower and Ford), military Generals, a First Lady and countless dignitaries. We will celebrate the signing of the declaration, the spirit of our community and the distinct and rebellious history that binds our community together. Events will include Military and Colonial Re-enactors, a dramatic reading of the Declaration, horses, military parades, cannon firing and good ol' American-styled patriotic celebration of who we are as a people.

Don't miss out on this **free event** celebrating Charlotte's history.

The celebration continues with Captain Jack's Dinner, to be held the evening of May 20th at the Olde Mecklenburg Brewery (OMB). This year's guest speaker is Paul Martin Newby, the 30th Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. (This year's dinner is SOLD OUT.)

The third event, the Captain James Jack Bike Ride, will take place on Sunday, May 23rd. Join us at noon, departing from OMB and riding to historical spots in Mecklenburg County including *The Spirit of Mecklenburg* statue honoring our very own hero, Captain Jack. The bike ride returns to OMB and will last roughly two hours with a social at the end.



From the Co-Chairs

Janet Dyer, MHA Docent Co-chairman

Such confusing times! With the successful vaccines more and more available, we are hopeful that we will be able to meet in person in the foreseeable future. At the same time, new virus variants are becoming dominant and may be slowing things down again. Thankfully, we have the technology to meet online even as we sometimes struggle to master that technology. Many thanks to Jane Estep for arranging the speakers for our Zoom programs. The programs presented at our last three general meetings by Captain Gamble, Larry Mellichamp, and Hugh Dussek were interesting and informative.

One of the areas of docenting that I enjoy is research. I especially like reading old letters and journals. (Maybe I am just nosy.) During the pandemic, I have been reading or, in some cases, rereading family letters. In November 1918 Mary Browne Erwin, my husband's maternal grandmother, was living in Davidson, NC with her husband and young son. Her youngest sister, Frances, was getting married in Atlanta on the Friday after Thanksgiving. Mary, unable to attend and feeling left out, begged her family to write to her about all the wedding activities. One reason Mary couldn't travel was because she was expecting a baby (my future mother-in-law.)

Check the date – November 1918. The Great War had just ended and the influenza epidemic was again surging in Atlanta. Tucked in the letters amidst the lists of wedding gifts and descriptions of the festivities are references to the epidemic and the war as they were directly affecting the Browne extended family.

Two of the bride's brothers fell ill a few days before the wedding.

To add to the other anxieties N.B. and Mac are both in bed this morning with virulent colds, and as the "Flu" has again taken violent hold on Atlanta, we can but feel anxious.

Fortunately it was not influenza and they recovered before the wedding.

The wedding ceremony was held in the bride's home with only immediate family invited.

She was the dearest sweetest little bride....

Bob is grand looking... and his uniform is so becoming....

They were married beneath the "Stars and Stripes."

There were no photos of the ceremony because of war restrictions.

I tried to get some flash light to take a picture of the wedding

but it is against the law to sell explosives now so we couldn't.

The ceasefire for the Great War began at the eleventh hour on the eleventh day in the eleventh month, November 11, 1918. Letters from some family members fighting in Europe were just arriving home at the end of November.

By the way, nothing more from Joe since we heard that he was wounded, and we hope that he may be sent over with the first contingent of returning soldiers.

Cheerful letter from William, says he is preparing for the winter campaign! [William] had not even heard rumors of peace.

Information gleaned from your own family letters or from archived collections adds greatly to the basic facts and our interpretation of our history. They help us to better understand our ancestors and also help us to put our own lives in perspective as we survive our own pandemic.

Stay well,

Janet Dyer, Docent Co-chair

MHA Docent Programs

Non-docents should request registration at

v.v.jones448@gmail.com by Saturday, May 1, 2021.

Login instructions will be sent before the call.

MHA Docent General Meeting Program May 4, 2021,

11:00a.m. Via Zoom

The Charlotte Trail of History

Presented by Tony Zeiss

Dr. Tony Zeiss chairs the **Charlotte Trail of History**. He will provide a PowerPoint presentation on this one-of-a-kind community amenity. The **Trail of History** raises private funds to place bronze statue projects featuring imminent historical Charlotteans along a one-mile section of The Little Sugar Creek Greenway uptown. This section runs south from the Central Piedmont Community College

Culinary building south to the Atrium Hospital complex. Eight projects are finished with two more in production. When finished, 22 historical projects will provide school children, Charlotte residents and visitors a unique experience in Mecklenburg County's past.

Anthony Zeiss, Ed.D. Executive Director, Coca-Cola Consolidated's t-factor Initiative – A national innovative training program that helps CEOs transform their workplaces into faith-centered, servant-centered, and purpose driven cultures.

The first Executive Director, beginning in January 2017, of the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., – an innovative, global, educational institution, whose purpose is to invite all people to engage with the history, the impact, and the narrative of the Bible. He is currently a consultant.

President Emeritus of Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, North Carolina – In 1992, he became its third president. During his tenure, the college grew from one campus to six and was recognized as a national leader in Workforce Development. Dr. Zeiss is a professional speaker and a frequent keynoter on resource development, workforce development, leadership, and career development.

In addition to the publication of several books on economic development, he authored a novel on the Revolutionary War in the South entitled, ***Backcountry Fury***, based on the 1780-81 memoirs of 16-year old Thomas Young.

Come join us and learn about the plans underway for Charlotte's Trail of History. We look forward to seeing you!

History News

News, thoughts and bits of history since we were last together.

Ramsour's Mill

Sarah Sue Hardinger

This year the Battle of Ramsour's Mill in Lincoln, NC will be commemorated in person and virtually. This will be the 241st anniversary and the date is June 5, 2021.

This battle, though in Lincoln County, has direct links to Mecklenburg County. The Mecklenburg County Militia took part in the battle including Hugh Torance. His Captain, Galbraith Falls, was killed in this action. Hugh later married his widow Isabella in 1783. Their son, James Torance ran Torance Store from 1805 to 1825 and then became the owner of the largest cotton plantation in Mecklenburg County. He built Cedar Grove.



For more information or to register, go to <https://www.ncssar.org/event/241st-battle-of-ramsours-mill-cg/>

Encampment at Mount Vernon

Sarah Sue Hardinger

Once again, some of the units from our area are participating in a huge gathering at Mount Vernon the weekend of April 30 to May 2. This is an invitation only event and both the NC 6th Continental Regiment and the First Mecklenburg Militia have been invited for at least the last three years. Of course, the event was cancelled last year but this year's battles, demonstrations, and presentations will go on in-person but under CDC safety guidelines. It is great news that historic sites and events are beginning to open up.



National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Trust for Historical Preservation is offering a large slate of presentations from nationally recognized speakers. Some require a donation but many are free. For example, May 7, Dr. Madeline Albright and David Rubenstein will be speaking at the Dolly Madison Legacy Event, May 11, Dr. Cathleen Cahill will speak on "Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement" and these are only two of 20 events in May.

Check out the website at SavingPlaces.org/historic-sites.

Deborah Hunter Retires from Historic Rosedale

It is with an abundance of good wishes and much thanks that Historic Rosedale Foundation announces the retirement of Executive Director Deborah Hunter. Deborah has been with the Foundation for over 15 years. In the beginning, she was charged with growing operations; adding staff, leading programming efforts, and courting donors. Her hard work was instrumental in making Historic Rosedale one of Charlotte's most visited sites. Deborah will be spending her new found free time on the South Carolina coast.



The MHA History Calendar Highlights

Admission charged at most events unless otherwise noted.

Many of these events sell out so it is best to register at the web sites.



MHA Docents

May 4, 2021, 11:00a.m. Via Zoom

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Archaeological Institute of America

Chapter 333: Central Carolinas

A special event will be held on Saturday, October 16, in honor of the

retirement of archaeologist, Prof. Michael Toumazou of Davidson College. The program will include 7 speakers from across the U.S., speaking on archaeology of Cyprus and focusing on the contributions of Prof. Toumazou's thirty years of excavation at the site of Athienou (see also <https://www.facebook.com/AthienouArchaeologicalProject/>).

Topics for other events will be early Cherokee writing found in southeastern caves; cultural heritage and environmental impact archaeology; Maya sacred places; the archaeology of Black women and civic activism.

Check back at the end of the summer for specific dates and Zoom information. For more information, contact Janet Levy at jelevy9999@aol.com

President James K. Polk Historic Site

12031 Lancaster Highway, Pineville, NC,
704 889 7145,
www.polk.nchistoricsites.org

First Lady:

Sarah Childress Polk

Saturday, May 08, 2021, 10:00 AM

Join us to hear this presentations from Tom Cole, Ph.D, Librarian, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. Sarah Childress Polk devoted her considerable intelligence and political

understanding to advancing the Southern planter's agenda: small government, low tariffs, and states' rights. She and husband James K. Polk saw eye-to-eye on political matters and functioned as a nineteenth-century power couple in their home state of Tennessee and in the nation's capital. Their private and public partnership remained strong throughout Mr. Polk's brief but effective Presidency. His untimely death in 1849 left her bereft but not forgotten, as the many visitors and well wishers to her home attest.

Kings Mountain Historical Museum

100 E Mountain St, Kings Mountain, NC, 704 739-1019,
<http://www.kingsmountainmuseum.org>

STITCHED: THE FABRICS OF A COMMUNITY

FREE EXHIBIT: Opens February 16th and runs through May 8th, 2021

Kings Mountain Historical Museum, Kings Mountain, NC

Open Tuesday-Saturday from 10-4

What does the term stitched mean? It is the process of making, mending, or joining with stitches. In relation to textiles, people have been sewing in one form or another, for thousands of years, with evidence that suggests even up to 20,000 years ago. Throughout history, it was a common task for people to make their own quilts, coverlets, clothes, and many

other everyday objects by hand stitching. Over time, improved sewing techniques led to the invention of the sewing machine, and machine stitching. This exhibit showcases a selection of stitched examples in our collections that were produced by members of the community in Kings Mountain, NC.

*This event will adhere to social distancing protocols and guidelines in place at the time of the event. Masks and temperature checks will be required upon entry.

York County Museums

Historic Brattonsville, the McCelvey Center, the Museum of York County and Main Street Children's Museum

Reopening – Members First

CHM Members will have the opportunity to visit our sites beginning Tuesday, May 4th. Note: Only CHM Members will be allowed to make reservations for May. Everyone else will have to wait until June.

Members will enjoy an exclusive first peek at the Museum of York County's highly anticipated permanent exhibition - Ice Age Carolinas: Exploring Our Pleistocene Past.

Be the first to explore a brand new playscape as Main Street Children's Museum officially reopens. And check out restorations made to

Historic Brattonsville's 18th and 19th-century structures.

Matthews Heritage Museum

232 North Trade St., Matthews, 704 708 4996,
www.matthewsheritagemuseum.org

The Museum is open to the public Thursday to Saturday from 10 to 4:30.

The exhibit North Carolina Pottery: A Tradition in Clay will remain on display til late August.

The exhibit features both historic utilitarian pieces, as well as more contemporary utilitarian pieces, and art and folk art pottery from several areas in North Carolina. It is an opportunity to learn a bit about the wide variety of pottery in the state from various traditions. From Salt glaze to red ware, crystalline to sgraffito, you will learn about many techniques.

Ramsour's Mill

402 Jeb Seagle
Dr, Lincolnton NC 28092

June 4 -5 10AM to 4 PM

In-person and virtual.

There is no real plan for any major re-enactment this year. There will be camps and selling areas, an evening Ghost Walk, and a generally great time.

On Saturday morning at 10 am, the Catawba Valley Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) and the local chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) are hosting a national Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Mass Grave near the top of the hill where the actual battle took place.



Gaston County Public Library

Jean Laffite Revealed:

*An Afternoon with
Ashley Oliphant and Beth Yarbrough*



Saturday, June 12th

Gaston County Public Library
1555 E. Garrison Blvd.
Gastonia, NC 28054

Admission is free
and registration is
required*



*Visit <https://gastonlibrary.libcal.com/event/7735728> or call 704-868-2164, Option 2 for more information. The limited audience needs to be masked and socially distanced.



Local authors Dr. Ashley Oliphant and Beth Yarbrough have proven that the pirate Jean Laffite faked his death in the 1820s, hid for a time in Cuba and then re-entered the United States using the alias Lorenzo Ferrer, settling first in Mississippi for the Cotton Boom and then Lincolnton, North Carolina. They even discovered his sword in the Freemason lodge he helped to found in 1852. Come hear about their research journey as they share how they unraveled the case.





“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 2020, 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

Membership Category	Single	Couple
Senior Citizen (over 60)	\$15.00	\$25.00
General	\$30.00	\$50.00
Patron	\$60.00	\$100.00
Life (Single Payment)	\$300.00	\$500.00
Student	Free	N/A

Name	
Address	
City, State, ZIP	
E-Mail	
Phone	

Membership type: (Please check one)

- ☐ General Membership
☐ MHA Docent Membership
☐ North Branch MHA Membership

Please send my MHA Newsletter via:
☐ Email (Please use this option if possible)
☐ US Postal Mail
☐ Both

If you have access to email, we prefer to send the newsletter to you that way. This saves considerable time and expense for MHA.

Thank you for your interest in history.