

# *The Pittsylvania Packet*

Spring 2005

Number 56



**Pittsylvania Historical Society  
Chatham, Virginia**

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## **President's Report**

The January membership meeting of the Pittsylvania Historical Society was held at Shadetree Rare Books under the sponsorship of Chatham Books. Our guest speaker was Stephen Ausband reviewing his recent book *Byrd's Line*. All who were unable to attend missed a good program on a very interesting book. The book is also a good read.

At the membership meeting the Danville VFW post presented to the Society a copy of a scrap book containing newspaper clippings of many of the area's World War II veterans. We now have it in the Museum.

This has also been a good few months for donations of artifacts to the Society. We have received from the Paul Harold estate 18 original paintings by W. G. Hibble and several other paintings and prints from other area artists, including Nancy Compton and Preston Moses. We have acquired a 1904 day-by-day log book from the Mountain View Plantation just south of Chatham and a working electric ceiling fan that was taken from the County Courthouse when it was remodeled. This fan will look real nice in the restored train station. Speaking of the train station, progress is being made on getting moneys released to begin work.

Look forwards to seeing many of you on the April bus trip.

- Langhorne Jones, Jr., President

## **Red Dot Means Renew**

If there is a red dot on your address label, we

have not received your renewal! (If you have just sent in your renewal, please ignore the dot.)

### **Note from The Editor**

I'd like to wish everyone a very happy spring! Thank you to all who have already renewed their memberships, and I hope that all those who haven't will choose to do so. Without our members who generously share their writing talents, time, donations, and so much more, the Pittsylvania Historical Society could not continue to exist.

- Sarah E. Mitchell

### **"Pittsylvania Pilgrimage 2005" (Saturday, April 9th 8:45 am-5:00pm)**

The Historical Society will conduct a bus tour to Greensboro, North Carolina on Saturday, April 9<sup>th</sup>. The bus will leave from the People's Bank Parking Lot in Chatham. We will first head to Blandwood, the home of John Motley Morehead (1798-1866), the acknowledged "Father of Modern North Carolina" who was Governor 1841-45. We will separate into two groups with guides to tour his home (an early Italian Villa), the original kitchen which now also contains a gift shop, and the sunken rose garden.

Next we will eat lunch (Dutch treat) at the K&W Cafeteria.

Greensboro Historical Museum is our next destination. The main museum building offers varied displays of interest such as artifacts from the Civil War era including several guns made in Chatham, Virginia, rooms on various historic topics (including copies of clothing and hats that belonged to Dolley Madison), displays of silver and clothing,

as well as Jugtown Pottery, memorabilia related to O. Henry, and historic photographs of the Greensboro area. These are just some of the many highlights to enjoy among the museum galleries. Tour guides will take us through the restorations, so we will divide into two groups for better viewing. After the tour we board the bus for the return to Chatham.

Tickets for the bus and tours are \$18 each and must be purchased in advance — be sure to get your tickets early, as seating is somewhat limited! Lunch will be your obligation. Tickets may be purchased by visiting the *Star-Tribune* office and talking to Susan Worley or by sending a check to:

PHS Bus Tour  
Pittsylvania Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1148  
Chatham, VA 24531

Please direct questions to Langhorne Jones, Jr. (434-432-9261 or Mary Catherine Plaster (434-432-8945).

### **There Will Be No Spring Membership Meeting**

The Pittsylvania Historical Society is not holding a regular Spring Membership Meeting; the Spring Bus Tour will be held in lieu of the regular meeting.

### **Veterans Memorial Wall and Walkway to be Constructed at Dan Daniel Park in Danville**

A Veterans Memorial will be constructed in Dan Daniel Memorial Park and will honor all veterans from Danville and Pittsylvania County. The Memorial is coordinated by the Veterans Memorial

Committee, with financial donations received by The Community Foundation and construction oversight by the City of Danville. Names of all Danville and Pittsylvania County Killed in Action in every war will be engraved in a wall at the memorial.

A centerpiece of the Memorial will also be the Veterans Memorial Walkway, a circular brick walkway with the names of veterans who served and are serving in war or peace time engraved in a brick dedicated in their honor. For more information, contact TCF/ Veterans Memorial Fund, 530 Main St, Suite 302, P. O. Box 1039, Danville, VA 24543, 434-793-0834.

### **Free Genealogy Course in Danville May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

The Virginia/North Carolina Piedmont Genealogical Society will be sponsoring a free one-day genealogy course taught by Mary Lee Boisseau on May 7th. The event will be held at the Danville Public Library on Patton Street in Danville. For more information, contact the Virginia/North Carolina Piedmont Genealogical Society at 434-799-5195 ext. 8 (the society does not return long distance phone calls, so try to call during hours when they are open). Their e-mail address is [vancsoc@gamewood.net](mailto:vancsoc@gamewood.net).

### **Second Heritage Book in the Works**

The first Heritage book was such a success, the Heritage Book Committee has decided to do a second volume! For more information, including how to submit articles, etc., contact Pittsylvania County Heritage Book, P.O. Box 185, Ringgold, VA 24586, or contact Anna Dodson, who is heading the project, at 434-822-6671 or at [roganna@gamewood.net](mailto:roganna@gamewood.net).

## **Society Formed to Preserve The Harvey Colored School**

A society has been formed to preserve the Harvey Colored School, a one-room school that served the African-American citizens of Callahan Hill from 1880 to 1964. The society hopes to restore the school and establish the first African-American museum in Pittsylvania County.

There are several ways to get more information; visit <http://www.harveyschoolhistoricalsociety.com>; contact Annie L. Mosby at (707)277-0252 or by e-mail at [annie.mosby@sbcglobal.net](mailto:annie.mosby@sbcglobal.net) for more information; or write to Harvey School Historical Society, 220 Vandola Church Road, Danville, VA 24541

## **Deadline for Submissions**

Please submit any announcements, articles, etc. for the next issue of *The Pittsylvania Packet* by June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005. Queries and articles are always welcome!

## **From Slave to Landowner: The Story of Ellen J. Miller**

*Editor's Note: The following story was printed in 1949 in **The Pittsylvania Star** (a forerunner of the **Star-Tribune**). Mrs. Miller passed away later that year. She and Sam Lovelace, who was written about before in the **Packet**, may have been the county's longest surviving ex-slaves.*

"It is suspected that many young people living today will never reach the ripe old age of 105 years

old if they have to follow the formula for longevity as set fourth by Aunt Ellen J. Miller, who was born in slavery and now owns a 100 acre farm near Markham in Pittsylvania County. When asked to what she owed her long life she said in a clear steady voice, 'My chile, I always worked hard, 'et lot of corn bread and fried meat and 'beyed the Lord.'

"Aunt Ellen, as she is known to her friends and neighbors, which include many white people who come to hear her tell about the olden days, was born as a slave on the farm of John Easley, near Ringgold, who was the owner of 30 other slaves. She does not exactly know the date of her birth, but she recalls that she was 19 years old when General Lee surrendered [editor's note: the 1880 census gives her age as 30, making her birth year 1850 — but the census records are not always correct]. She relates that she was a house girl in the Easley home, but also did much work, weeding corn and tobacco, and during the [Civil W]ar days she was taught carding to make clothing for the Confederate soldiers.

"Asked how she was treated by her owners, she told that she received good treatment because she was a good worker, but explained [that] she had seen some of the other slaves whipped.

### **Got Pair [of] Shoes at Xmas**

"During the war days Aunt Ellen recalls the hardships and said that she remembers [that] she never got a pair of shoes except at Christmas, and when they wore out, she went barefooted until Christmas again.

"Her father was taken off to fire the boiler on a steam boat in the Confederate Navy, and she said

Jim Scott from Pittsylvania was the commander of the boat. [Editor's note: I have not yet found records of a Confederate boat that matches this description; if anyone has information, please share it.]

“When the war came to an end, Aunt Ellen stated that it was not long afterward that some ‘Yankee men’ came to the Easley farm and told the slaves that they were free, and were no longer under ‘bondage of slavery.’ She says [that] they were scared and did not know what to do. She stayed on through the crop season and that fall her aunt took her to Danville. In Danville, Aunt Ellen stated [that] she was hired to do housework for Dr. Billie Green and later Dr. William Boyd. Then her father came and she stated [that] he took her to the Witcher place near Markham, and at Christmas time of 1865 she married John Miller. They had eight children [Susan, Sarah, Louisa, John, Mary E., Bettie, Iverson, and Nannie], only two of whom are still living [as of 1949], Mrs. Nannie V. Clark, of Long Side, New York, and Iverson Miller who lives on the farm of his mother at Markham. There are 150 grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great, great grandchildren. Her husband died 39 years ago.

### **Lives Alone**

“By the help of his wife and children before [her husband] died, he was able to buy a 100 acre farm that formerly belonged to Will Petty and Nat Witcher. Aunt Ellen still lives alone in the neatly kept log cabin, and although her daughter-in-law, who lives only a short distance away, brings her meals she still insist[s] on working in the garden. She also tends her chickens, brings water from the spring and does some sewing. Her voice is clear and steady, she has a strong memory, does not use glasses when she sews, and has never dipped snuff.

“Though she cannot read, she keeps a Bible

close at hand, and often is seen fondly holding it and looking at the Lord's Word. For 70 years she has been a member of the Baptist Church and has attended services regularly even in the latter years.

"Last week she was taken ill and the doctor put her to bed, but she still thinks about the time when she will get back to looking after her chickens and the other work around the house."

## **Diphtheria and Pittsylvania County**

By Sarah E. Mitchell

*"In the neighborhood of Pig[g] River, Pittsylvania [C]ounty, the diphtheria has been raging to an alarming extent for some three weeks or more. Over fifty deaths have occurred in one week. The doctors are unable to cope with it. Numbers of persons have died within twenty-four hours after taking it."*

- *The Halifax Advertiser*, Sept. 15, 1882

Diphtheria was a much-feared and not-fully-understood disease in the 1800's. *Dr. Chase's Third Last and Complete Receipt Book and Household Physician* (1891) described graphically the disease:

*"The disease begins in the form of a whitish spot on one or both tonsils, unaccompanied at first by fever, and attended with only a trifling degree of uneasiness in swallowing. By and by this spot enlarges; its edges become of a florid color, fever steals on, and the act of swallowing becomes painful. A slough gradually forms, with evident ulceration at its edges; the fever increases, and headache and restlessness supervene. The*

*partial separation of the slough, together with the rosy color of the edges of the ulcer, with the moderate degree of fever for some days, promise a favorable issue. But very unexpectedly, slowness of breathing, without either difficulty [or] wheezing takes place, with excessive and sudden sinking of the living powers; and it generally happens that within a day from this change the fatal event occurs; the breathing at first falls to eighteen respirations in the minute, then to sixteen, to twelve, and finally to ten or eight. . . .”*

In the late 1800's the cause of the disease was unclear — claims were made that it was caused by fungus growth on damp wallpaper or by eating too much pork in the diet (in fact, it was suggested that parents put children on a bread, milk, and vegetable diet when diphtheria outbreaks occurred in the vicinity of one's home). Today we know that diphtheria is a bacterial infection that can be and is generally prevented by vaccinations — although in certain parts of the world it remains a health risk. (By the way, the Iditarod Dog Race in Alaska is run every year in memory of the 1925 race to get diphtheria serum from Anchorage, Alaska to Rome, Alaska when an outbreak occurred and threatened many lives.)

The remedies suggested back in the late 1800's ranged from very primitive to perhaps deadly all by themselves! Sucking on ice; gargling with lemon juice, sulphur, a combination of mercury and other items, or a mix of chlorine and water; a poultice of sliced onions and salt pork placed on the neck; swabbing with calomel; or placing a cloth soaked with turpentine on the neck were all possible cures. Another suggestion was to burn a mixture of tar and turpentine spirits beside the patient's bed! *(Obviously, none of these remedies should be tried today.)*

# Feedsack Dresses

By Jordan Kee

*Editor's Note: Historical Society member Mrs. Kee now lives in Chatham. She makes and sells girls' flour sack dresses using sacks from area mills, including Dry Fork Milling Company, Gretna Milling Company, etc., as well as other historic mills and milling companies elsewhere. (Mrs. Kee can be contacted at 434-432-2735 or at MimiKee@aol.com ; examples of her work can also be seen at the Chatham Antique Mall.)*

*In the following reminiscences, Mrs. Kee talks about her past and explains how she became involved in making flour sack dresses.*

I grew up in Smithfield, VA and was raised by my grandmother along with a number of cousins and two brothers. We lived on (and quite literally) off the farm and what we made or grew. We raised our own pork and beef, ate only what we grew in terms of vegetables, including potatoes and onions all year — made our own jam and butter, etc. We all worked the fields together with the hired black field hands. We ate together under the shelter of the barn in hot weather or on the porch off the kitchen in cold weather. We did not have indoor plumbing until I was a senior in high school in 1966!

I recall vividly the excitement of going to Southern States Feed Store to pick up chicken feed for new baby chicks. We of course had to carefully carry those chicks from the mailbox up the lane when they were delivered by the post man. New chicks meant a new dress for me! I loved passing through the stacks of feed — the smell is still with me — and trying to decide which pattern I liked the best! My Grandmother used to make whatever we needed (not necessarily wanted) from whatever

fabric she had around. The chicken feed sack dresses was for special occasions — like school or church. Flour sack dresses were for working at home! The fabric was more durable though not nearly as pretty — but they never wore out! My male cousins and brothers had their breeches made from the sack cloth as well. Long flour sack pants became short ones in the summer!

When I recall now the hard work and the struggle, I wish I had appreciated all that was done for me by my Grandmother. Things she did — like making our clothes using just a needle and thread by lamplight — mean so much to me now. We always had homemade biscuits each and every day cooked in a woodstove in the kitchen. So there was no shortage of flour sacks. At times she would use scraps of other fabric to trim the dresses. She made a quilt from my Grandfather's old shirt after he died and slept with that quilt until she died.

Pieces of our past shape our future. Those flour sack dresses remind me of love, caring and hard work. They remind me that I was loved and cared for — even as I worked in the field from daylight until dark. Even when I woke at 4 AM to milk the two cows before walking the dirt lane to catch the school bus for a one hour ride to school. My granddaughter has a flour sack dress and loves to hear over and over the stories of my life. There is a part of me that will always be there. The little blond girl — skinny as a rail — brown as a berry in the summer — wearing the flour sack dress feeding the chickens, carrying water from the well and wood from the shed. Those were wonderful times.



## **Chatham Hall's Movie Star: Margaret Sullavan**

By Sarah E. Mitchell

Did you know that the 1930's - 1950's actress Margaret Sullavan attended Chatham's own Chatham Hall? Ms. Sullavan was born Margaret Brooke in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1911. She graduated from Chatham Hall in 1927 and promptly joined a Massachusetts theater group called the University Players (which boasted members Jimmy Stewart and Henry Fonda). Despite her parents' reservations about her working as an actress, she went on to work in plays on Broadway, and eventually on to Hollywood where she performed in almost twenty films.

Margaret Sullavan's first film was 1933's *Only Yesterday*, in which she played an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Southern belle with an illegitimate child. Margaret also played a Southern belle in *So Red the Rose*, a Civil War drama. When not being cast as a Southerner, Margaret was often cast as German, Hungarian, Eastern European, or Jewish. She took on very serious roles as well as comedies, and a dis-

proportionate number of her roles seemed to end with her untimely demise — usually from some awful illness.

Margaret was nominated for an Academy Award in 1938 for her role in *Three Comrades*, the screenplay for which was written in part by F. Scott Fitzgerald. (The three comrades in the title were played by Robert Young, Robert Taylor, and Franchot Tone; evidently the movie was something of a tearjerker, as Margaret's character Pat Hollman was dying of tuberculosis.)

Today Margaret Sullavan is perhaps best remembered for one of her later roles, *The Shop Around the Corner*, in which she appeared with Jimmy Stewart. (I personally have seen that movie, and I would never have thought that the Budapest shop clerk Klara Novak was actually being played by a Virginia girl!) Margaret also appeared opposite Jimmy Stewart in *Next Time We Love*, *Shopworn Angel*, and *The Mortal Storm*.

Ms. Sullavan was married several times (Henry Fonda was her first husband). In later life, she struggled with deafness. She passed away in 1960.

## **Punishing A Profiteer in Pittsylvania**

*Editor's Note: The following is an editorial from a Southern magazine published in 1862. The tale is probably a bit of fiction or satire, but does highlight the real problem of certain individuals taking advantage of times of tumult for personal gain. (In the Pittsylvania man's defense, travel during wartime could be risky and he did have to go to some effort to deliver the packages, so he may have felt justified in asking for money.)*

“Jesse Holmes is the name of the ‘Fool Killer,’

employed by the *Milton (N. C.) Chronicle*. He is supposed to carry a great club, with which he beats out the brains of fools. Since the war broke out, all the fools he has killed have been knaves. . . . [Here is a description of one of Jesse's exploits:]

*"In Pittsylvania I nabbed a 'patriotic' lark who charged soldiers five dollars a piece for taking them packages of clothing. You see he was going to Winchester any how, and a parcel of neighbours wishing to send their sons clothing, &c., put them in a big box and paid the freight to Richmond, from which point to Winchester the box, as I was informed, went free, my hero, having little or no trouble with it; arriving there he made each soldier shell out five dollars on [i. e., in order to receive] the bundle. My indignation was so great, that on collaring him I walked into him with my club without pausing for an explanation or to learn his name, and made him 'walk-talk ginger-blue, get over on 'tother side of Jordan,' where the road is a hard one to travel."*

"When Jesse is out of employment, let him come to Richmond. What would he do with a man who would carry on Sunday a barrel of snacks — each snack composed of a slice of meat, between two slices of bread — and sell them to Gen. Lee's soldiers at a dollar a piece? What would he do with a man who would boast that he had made \$65 on a barrel of apples, sold to the soldiers? Such a man is said to live in Richmond."

From George William Bagby, "Editorial," *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*, Volume 34, Issue 12, Dec 1862, p. 693, courtesy University of Michigan — Making of America.

## Chatham's Population and Newspapers in the 1870's

From *The Centennial newspaper exhibition, 1876: A complete list of American newspapers. A statement of the industries, characteristics, population and location of towns in which they are published; also, A descriptive account of the great newspapers of the day*, George P. Howell & Company, New York, NY, 1876, pp. 158, and appears courtesy of the University of Michigan — Making of America.

Pittsylvania C. H. [Pittsylvania Court House, now Chatham], Pittsylvania Co., 1,200 p. [persons] in a planting district, 16 m. [miles] N. of Danville and 40 S. by W. of Lynchburg.

*Chatham Tribune* . . . . . W. [weekly] 7,599  
*Pittsylvania Courier*. . . . . W. [weekly] 7,600

## Pittsylvania Historical Society Books

*The Historical Society books are currently available for purchase from the following retailers. Suggested retail prices do not include shipping, handling, or tax.*

**Chatham Books**, 10 North Main Street, P. O. Box 71,  
Chatham, VA 24531, 434-432-2488,  
chathambooks@gamewood.net

**Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History**, 975 Main  
Street, Danville, VA 24541, 434-793-5644

**Mitchells Publications**, P. O. Box 429, Chatham, VA  
24531, 434-432-0595, 1-800-967-2867,  
answers@foodhistory.com,

<http://www.MitchellsPublications.com>

**News and Novels**, 3282 Riverside Drive, Danville, VA  
24541, 434-793-3407

**Shadetree Rare Books**, P. O. Box 994, Chatham  
Antique Gallery, Chatham, VA 24531, 434-432-1400,  
[hhurt@adelphia.net](mailto:hhurt@adelphia.net),  
<http://www.ShadetreeRareBooks.com>

\* \* \* \*

Maud Carter Clement, *History of Pittsylvania County*  
(Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Madelene Fitzgerald, *Pittsylvania Homes and History of the Past* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$18.

Roger Dodson, *Footprints from the Old Survey Books*  
(Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Madelene Fitzgerald and Frances Hallam Hurt, *18th Century Landmarks of Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Softcover)  
Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Gray's *Map of Chatham, Virginia 1878* (Frameable Map)  
Suggested Retail Price: \$3.

Frances Hallam Hurt, *An Intimate History of the American Revolution in Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Hardcover)  
Suggested Retail Price: \$15.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania County's Historic Courthouse: The Story Behind Ex Parte Virginia and the Making of a National Landmark* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania's Eighteenth-Century Grist Mills* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$23.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania's Nineteenth-Century Grist Mills* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$23.

Herman Melton, *Thirty-Nine Lashes Well Laid On: Crime and Punishment in Southside Virginia 1750—1950* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Judge Langhorne Jones, *Tales from a Small Town*  
(Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$5.