



Shenandoah  
County  
**Historical  
Society**

**Winter 2024**

# ***Newsletter***

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### **New Life Members**

Terry Showman  
Jaclyn Neely  
Edward & Joann Rinaca  
Kim Uhl  
Kim Yeck

### **New Members**

Leslie Richards  
Charles & Deborah French

### **ATTENTION**

#### **ARE YOUR DUES DUE??**

The date beside the name on your mailing label is the month and year your membership is due. Thank you for staying current. Rates on Page 6.

Please note new amounts.

## **SCHS and History Council to Expand Website**

SCHS and History Council to bring county history organizations together online with new website

The members of the Shenandoah County History Council, representing 11 county historical organizations, have agreed to partner with the Shenandoah County Historical Society with a new website that will serve as an online "history gateway" for the county.

The new website is planned to provide a more unified and enhanced visibility for county historical organizations, [Continued on Page 5]

## **Program Meeting**

Tuesday, March 19th, 2024  
7:00 PM

### **St. Paul's Heritage Center**

106 S. High St., Edinburg, VA  
Program:

### **Peggy's War**

Join us to celebrate the 193rd birthday on March 19 of Margaret "Peggy" Rhodes, when her great-great-grandson, Karl Rhodes, presents this remarkable story. Karl is the author of *Peggy's War*, a historical novel of Peggy's life in the Valley during the Civil War. Peggy, like most Mennonites, opposed slavery, secession and war, but she also clearly sided with the Union in the conflict. She went a step further by running a depot on the underground railroad for Mennonites and Dunkers who refused to fight on either side. Peggy did so while tending to her five children, ailing husband and a 120-acre farm.

## **Nominations are Invited for the 2024 John H. Adamson Excellence in Preservation Awards**

In 2014 the Shenandoah County Historical Society established an Excellence in Historic Preservation Awards program to be given at the annual meeting and banquet in May of each year. The purpose of the program is to honor projects within Shenandoah County that deserve recognition for their preservation efforts. By doing so we hope to encourage others to follow the examples of those being recognized. These awards continue an earlier program that had been created by the former Shenandoah Preservation League.

In 2022 this award was renamed as the John H. Adamson Excellence in Historic Preservation Award, to honor the late Mr. Adamson for his numerous significant contributions to the Society. The Awards are intended to recognize outstanding projects in the fields of history, architecture, scenic beauty, and material culture (this includes furniture, textiles, documents, folk art, photography, basketry, tools and more).

[Continued on Page 3]

## **Reminder**

As has been our practice the past two years, the Courthouse Museum and Visitor Center, as well as the SCHS bookstore, will be closed for January and February. Mail orders for books will continue to be processed as well as genealogy assistance. Requests for individual private tours can be arranged by calling the SCHS office at 540-459-1795. The office is not manned at all times but if you leave a message someone will get back to you.



This Newsletter can  
be sent to you  
electronically.  
Many photos will  
appear in color, and  
it saves postage !  
Notify us at:  
schs.va@gmail.com

*The  
Shenandoah County  
Historical Society, Inc.*

is a  
501 (c)(3) non-profit  
organization.

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Janet Wagniere

## From the: Shenandoah County Archives

By Zach Hottel, Archivist

### African American Minstrel Performers



18-0507-0279, African American Minstrel Performers, Series II: Morrison Photographs, George William Smith Collection, Truban Archives, Shenandoah County Library, Edinburg, Virginia

### Message from the President



Barbara Adamson

As I write this I see that the weather forecast for the Christmas holidays does not include snow and hope that the New Year forecast is similar. Some serious snows have been predicted for winter 2024 and it would be nice if they were delayed until after the holidays. Despite our recent beneficial rains, snow would be good for the North Fork and groundwater levels.

The Historic Courthouse is closed for the season and will reopen on Friday, March 1, 2024. I send a thank you to our intrepid volunteers, who make it possible to have the Visitor Center and Museum open. They include Anna Mae Ortgies, Sharon Lee, Suzanne McElwee, Kevin Frazier, Sallie Raynor, Jim Stevenson, Kim Stevenson, Dennis Atwood, Susan Walls, Kent Womack, Robert Frye and Karen Whetzel. We especially appreciate Janet Wagniere, who schedules our volunteers. This is a thankless job – we thank her for carrying it out so ably!

As always, we would like to have more volunteers to help us keep the Historic Courthouse open to the public. It would be great if we could at least add Thursday back to our open days. If you'd like to help, please contact a board member or leave a message at 540-459-1795.

Our other important volunteers include Kathy Rivers, who helps folks searching for family genealogy information. She does a very thorough job. In addition, I thank Meg Trott and Jean Martin, who are helping to keep an eye on the Klaus Wust manuscript project and hopefully move it forward. Jim and Kim Stevenson not only serve as docents at the Historic Courthouse; they also assist with the annual Excellence in Preservation Awards with Jim as Chair of that committee and Kim a member. And Zach Hottel, County Archivist, is always there to help when asked, leads the History Council and contributes a column for each SCHS newsletter. Speaking of newsletters, I know all of us thank Janet Wagniere for producing an excellent quarterly newsletter. I know for those members who live far away, this offers a touch of what's going on here in Shenandoah County. Hank Zimmerman, who keeps our website current, is currently working to update the SCHS website.

We had four excellent program meetings in 2023. The year began in March with Mark Feaster telling us the interesting story of his restoration of Suzanne McIlwee's great-great grandfather's cabin! At the annual dinner in May we enjoyed Hoyle Laughlin II and Hoyle Laughlin III's telling of some history and an update about our local Laughlin Auctions. [Cont. on Page 3]

## Black History Month Program Will Honor Minstrel Groups

This photograph on the left shows a group of sixteen African American musicians and performers, some in black face, who are part of the "Virginia Minstrels." This performance troupe was organized by Mt. Zion Methodist Church in Woodstock to conduct a series of fundraising performances to raise money for the construction of a new church building.

Based on reports in the Shenandoah Herald, this group was popular locally and conducted several performances in Woodstock and surrounding communities. It was advertised as featuring "New Songs, New Jokes, New Plays, and Full Jazz Band."

Minstrel shows were a form of theater popular in the 19th and 20th centuries that comically portrayed stereotypes of African Americans. Numerous minstrel performances are documented in Shenandoah County. Most featured white actors in black face.

Among the individuals identified in this photograph are Preston Scott, William H. Polk, Lewis McAfee, Elsie F. Pye McAfee, and Charles Butcher.

This photograph, the Virginia Minstrels, and the members of the local African American community who participated will be the topic of the library's annual Black History Month program to be held at 6:30PM on Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at the Shenandoah County Library.

## Preservation Awards -- [Cont. from Page 1]

The original, or source object(s) must be at least 60 years old, and the preservation project must have been completed to be eligible for consideration.

"Each year we look forward to receiving a number of high quality applications," Society president Barbara Adamson said. "Shenandoah County is rich in accomplished and potential historic preservation projects and we are pleased to be able to support this awards program. The Society believes that the quality of life in Shenandoah County is greatly enhanced by preserving evidence of our unique history, and that publically recognizing these achievements may bring about a greater awareness of the value of historic preservation."

Application deadline is April 1 of each year. Nomination forms will be available in early winter throughout Shenandoah County at libraries, museums and town historical societies, and by contacting the Society at 540-459-1795, or by e-mail at [schs.va@gmail.com](mailto:schs.va@gmail.com). In addition, you may view and print a copy of the nomination form by going to the Society website at [www.SCHS1795.com](http://www.SCHS1795.com). (Our Organization/Interest Areas/Preservation Awards) You will also find a listing of the previous awardees on the site.



### SCHS is on FACBOOK

Visit our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/SCHSVA](http://www.facebook.com/SCHSVA) or simply click on the Facebook icon at the bottom of our website main page: [www.SCHS1795.com](http://www.SCHS1795.com)

## Quilt Mystery Information Requested

The Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, in Winchester, is researching and reconstructing histories for some of its quilts acquired from Mildred "Micki" Helsley (1925-2018). In particular, they are seeking information related to a "Mrs. Garvey" living in Lantz Mill and/or Edinburg from the 1970s - early 1990s, who purportedly owned two basket quilts collected by Micki and/or Bruce Helsley. While unlikely, the "Garvey" name could be a misspelling of more common Shenandoah County names like Carver.

Anyone with information should contact Curator of Collections Nick Powers at (540) 662-1473, ext. 205.



## Black History Month Program to be Presented at the Shenandoah County Library.

On Page 2 of the newsletter, in his regular column, Library Archivist, Zach Hottel, focused on Minstrel shows that were popular entertainment in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Zach included a photograph of a local group that named several well-known individuals and was taken by Woodstock photographer, Hugh Morrison, Jr.

This photograph, the Virginia Minstrels, and the members of the local African American community who participated will be the topic of the library's annual Black History Month program to be held at 6:30PM on Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at the Shenandoah County Library.

## Strasburg Museum Exhibit on Display at Courthouse Visitor Center

The new display at the historic courthouse, beginning March 1, will feature a selection of artifacts from the Strasburg Museum. The Museum has an amazing variety of historic items that focus on the history of Strasburg and its surrounding area. The exhibit may include pieces about Hupp's Hill, the Civil War, Native Americans, the Ladies of Fishers Hill, to name a few possibilities. Come see what the Museum curators pull out of their hats!

The exhibit will be at the Visitor Center from March through May.

### SCHS COMPLETE BOOK LIST

Is available on web site: [www.SCHS1795.com](http://www.SCHS1795.com)

## 2024 Heritage Day Planned for April 13th

Plans are already underway for this annual countywide day of sharing our history. It is set for Saturday, April 13, 2024 at the New Market Fire Hall on South Congress St. in New Market.

The Fire Hall is a wonderful, large space and so we're hoping that, in addition to our local history organizations, we'll have many individuals who will attend to bring and share their historical stories.

We invite you to come and exhibit family history, house history, church histories, cemetery histories, town and village histories and more. Many topics to choose from! There is no cost involved; we supply tables and chairs.

Heritage Day is hosted by SCHS and the Shenandoah County Library Archives. For more information, you may contact Zach Hottel, county archivist at 540-984-8200 or leave a message at the SCHS phone, 540-459-1795 and we'll get back to you.

## President's Message -

[Cont. from Page 2]

September brought Nick Powers, Curator at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, whose presentation was titled, *Everything But the Bedroom Quilt*. And in November, historian Gabe Neville presented his *Shenandoah County Patriots Not Named Muhlenberg*. We offered a wonderful variety of outstanding programs. And thanks to Hank Zimmerman, we're now able to spread the word about county history with our programs viewed on YouTube.

Last I thank our Board of Directors, without whom SCHS couldn't operate. They are Dennis Atwood, Anne Dellinger, Kenna Fansler, Rick Lytton, Ellen Markel, Suzanne McIlwee, Mary Redmon, Janet Wagniere, Susan Walls, Karen Whetzel and Hank Zimmerman. Our treasurer, Laura Zimmerman, while not a board member, is a critical part of the team! Happy New Year!

## Upcoming Event

Monday, February 19th - 2 to 4 PM  
Free open house at **George Washington's Office Museum**, 32 W. Cork Street in Winchester, VA, to celebrate Washington's 292st birthday. For info, call: 540-662-4412 or visit the Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society website:

[winchesterhistory.org](http://winchesterhistory.org)

## Longrifles in History by Gene Comstock

In the early Valley the gunsmith was a very important trades-



tradition is believed to have begun in the neighborhood of Christian

man. In the early settlement period the Valley's rifle production was one of the most important and distinctive in America. The western migration of people seeking land was primarily through the Shenandoah Valley where the important rifle was purchased to satisfy the life style of that time. Food and protection were indeed important to the early migrant settlers. Early hostilities and later periods of political unrest mandated a gun in every home. Adults and children alike were taught the proper use of the long rifle. From the time the Valley was known as the Second Frontier until well after the War Between the States there were more than eighty recorded gunsmiths or apprentices in the area.

Adversaries feared the American Rifle, commonly known as the Kentucky, the Pennsylvania, or the Longrifle, due to its shot distance, speed, and accuracy. Prior to the emergence of the American Longrifle, about the second quarter of the eighteenth century, French, German, and primarily British imported guns were used throughout the colonies. The large bore guns imported from England were weak and lacked style and accuracy. The German guns were perhaps somewhat better. Such guns were adequate for European needs, but not in America where life in an emerging society with a hostile frontier required a reliable, accurate gun, which could be used for protection and food gathering. The ingenuity of the American gunsmith is responsible for a gun that was the envy of all gun-producing societies.

European rifles had a large bore and a short barrel, both of which inhibited its projectile speed and performance. American rifles were being produced with smaller bores and improved rifling (swirling channels inside the barrel that made the bullet spin, increasing its velocity and distance) and a longer barrel to increase accuracy. When the basic prototype was perfected, innovations were incremental, although around 1825, new firing mechanisms were developed, and gunsmiths throughout the years experimented with their gun's balance and weight.

The origin of the American longrifle

Springs, Pennsylvania, during the 1730s. From there, American-style gun making spread to adjacent areas, moving to the west and southwest as those regions were settled. Gunsmiths began opening their businesses in Shenandoah Valley towns about 1750. Great opportunities were presented to gunsmiths in the area of Winchester by the settlers moving south and west. Land speculators, explorers, families looking for homes or on the move, and trade itinerants, planned ahead to stop in Winchester for wagons, provisions, and guns. Gun makers from distant areas of the country looked to Valley gunsmiths for the latest in gun technology. John Easterly, for example, a Tennessee gunsmith, wrote to Henry Spitzer of New Market, "I'm calculating to come to work with you during next winter season...I do not calculate on gain, my principle motive in coming will be to reside where information of every kind necessary can be had."

Guns made in the Valley are similar to those of other areas, especially Lebanon County, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Some Valley rifles have distinct characteristics that are now identified as the Winchester school of longrifle design. Because the area did not attract a constant influx of gunsmiths due to its small population, most gun styles evolved from models brought by the trade relatively early in the Valley's settlement. There were gun makers not oriented to the Winchester style that did, however, inhabit the upper Valley. Influential gunsmiths, whose products were admired, were copied by their peers and led to a continuity of features that would grow to represent a regional style.

Innovations of their own were introduced by gun makers in the form of the rifle butt, the architecture of the wooden stock, and decorative applications, but in some ways, basic Valley design seems to have frozen in time around the 1780s and the 1820s. Gun makers were wont to change the decorative aspects of construction, regardless of how they were trained to handle the technological aspects; never, however, would they derogate the accuracy or any other basic principle of ballistics. The new technology in the develop-

## A Hint to Candidates

[From the *Shenandoah Herald*, Friday, March 28, 1919]

As the time for the election of county officers draws near, the list of names of candidates grows longer, a list which we will be pleased to publish in the usual manner. In order that new candidates may appreciate the work before them, the sworn statement of a Georgia candidate for county commissioner as published in the *Newark Register*, is given. It is as follows:

"Lost 1,340 hours sleep thinking about the election. Lost two front teeth and a whole lot of hair, in a personal encounter with an opponent. Donated one beef, four shoats and five sheep to a county barbecue. Gave away two pair of suspenders, four calico dresses, \$5.00 cash and thirteen baby rattles, Kissed 126 babies. Kindled fourteen kitchen fires. Put up four stoves. Walked 1,076 miles, shook hands with 9,508 persons. Told 10,101 lies and talked enough to make in print, 1,000 volumes. Attended sixteen revival meetings, and was baptized four different times by immersion, and twice some other way. Contributed \$50 to foreign missions, and made love to nine grass widows. Hugged forty-nine old maids. Got dog bit thirty-nine times, and was defeated." His opponent evidently spent his money for printers ink.

## Longrifles - [Continued]

ment of the new firing mechanisms, about 1825, would have most assuredly brought some changes. Decorative variations such as carving to the gun butt and forestock, and brass embellishment of patch-box, inlays, and trigger guard, were among the notable stylistic developments of Valley gunsmiths. On occasion, Valley gunsmiths sent their unembellished guns to local silversmiths for decorative additions in order to advance on the competition.

Gunsmiths such as the Laucks and Haymaker family thrived in Winchester before and after the Revolutionary War. These tradesmen brought with them and also improved the eastern Pennsylvania gun styles. Simon Lauck's rifle butt and his patch-box configuration became the standard of the Valley style. The ubiquitously incised carving decoration of Valley gunbutt stocks is thought to have partially originated in Lauck's Winchester shop. His innovations were not only stylistic, for they improved the gun's weight and balance to a very positive degree. The influences of the Lauck family are seen on the products of a number of gunsmiths in the Valley because many of

[Continued on Page 6]

## New Item for Sale



A new Shenandoah County Historical tote bag, pictured above, is now for sale at the Courthouse Visitor Center or by mail order until the Center reopens in March. The SCHS logo is on the side.

The bag is 17" wide, 14" high and 3" deep, is apple green & black. It is made of heavy polyester, has a large outside pocket with places to store pins and cards. There is also an outside pocket for a water bottle and the bag can be closed with a zipper at the top. The bag sells for \$12 and if shipped, add \$5 for shipping and handling.

## SCHS Website - [Cont. from Page 1]

but in no way will interfere with any existing websites or any other established online entities. To that end, the function will be similar to the way county community library web pages have for years been included on the county library website, where dedicated pages provide key information about each community library. The libraries continue to maintain their own separate autonomy and identity.

In a similar way, the ShenandoahCountyHistoricalSociety.org website will be partially repurposed to include dedicated pages for each of the History Council member organizations, and, where possible, channel increased online visits via direct links to their own website or social media pages, should any currently exist.

The SCHS website will also continue to provide an area calendar of upcoming history-interest public events, but will now take a more proactive effort in including a more comprehensive listing of events that go on in the county. The website will also continue to promote historic preservation and provide information about the SCHS organization and programs.

The Shenandoah County History Council was established in 2016 by Shenandoah County Library Archivist Zach Hottel to establish an organization dedicated to interpreting, preserving and sharing the history of Shenandoah County. One of the goals of the SCHS mission is to "foster a spirit of cooperation" among various members of the Shenandoah County history-interest community, as well as to preserve and promote county history.

The History Council member organizations include Fort Valley Museum, Hupp's Hill Civil War Park & Visitor's Center, Mt. Jackson Museum, Hottel-Keller Memorial, Shenandoah County Historical Society, Shenandoah County Library, Edinburg Heritage Foundation/Museum at the Edinburg Mill, Strasburg Heritage Association, Strasburg Museum, Woodstock Museum and the New Market Historical Society.

## Upcoming Events

Thursday, January 25, 2024 7:00  
New Market Town Council Chambers



### A History of Mining in the Shenandoah Valley presented by Dave Cress



There are records of 78 mines listed by the United States Geological Survey that are located in Shenandoah County. Some mines supplied materials used to create weapons during the revolutionary and civil wars.

Dave Cress, a mining engineer, will detail the history of mining in our valley with emphasis on "furnaces" and the making of iron locally from iron ore. Dave is the owner of Quarry Permitting, Environmental, and Training Services LLC in Winchester.

Guests are invited • Light refreshments are served

[www.newmarkethistoricalsociety.org](http://www.newmarkethistoricalsociety.org)



Thursday, March 21, 2024 7:00  
Manor Memorial Methodist Church  
New Market



### Tomb of the Unknown Soldier A Century of Honor, 1921-2021 presented by Phillip Bigler

Quicksburg resident Philip Bigler will present a program based on the history of one of the most unique monuments in the United States - the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. His book, **Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: A Century of Honor, 1921-2021** tells the story of the shrine that was put up to honor the country's fallen soldiers. Bigler, who worked as a historian at Arlington National Cemetery in the 1980s, said he spent two years doing research on the monument, which was set up at the cemetery after the end of the first World War.

Our annual dinner program is returning with this March 21 program as a buffet dinner prior to the presentation in Farrow Hall at Manor Memorial Methodist Church in New Market.

Menu and complete details will be available mid-January on our website and at the January 25, 2024 meeting.

[www.newmarkethistoricalsociety.org](http://www.newmarkethistoricalsociety.org)

For more info on either of these events, contact: 540-740-2740

Or, [nmhs@newmarkethistoricalsociety.org](mailto:nmhs@newmarkethistoricalsociety.org)

## An Old-time Cure for Freckles

[By: Susie Fitzwater Welch of Rockingham County  
and her old-time cures.]

Here's one: "It is a rather widely known folk remedy that dew on the first day in May can remove freckles. Richard Welch (Susie's son) had a lot of freckles on his face as a child. He hated the splotchy look. Susie told him to get up on the first day of May without speaking to anyone, go outside and gather up some dew from the grass with his hands, and then wipe his hands over his face and freckles. After that, he was to put his hands where he wanted the freckles to go. Richard rubbed the dew on his face, but afterward, he wasn't sure where to put his hands. He crossed his arms over his chest and grasped the opposite shoulder. At the time, he was wearing a sleeveless undershirt, common at the time. The freckles did leave his face, but he had freckles on his shoulders until the day he died."

[Reprinted From the *Shenandoah Valley Folklife Society Newsletter*, Summer 2007.]



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### Join the SCHS

#### New Yearly Dues:

Member: \$15 (Newsletter by E-mail)

Member: \$20 (Mailed newsletter)

Lifetime \$250

Send Fee to address above.

Renewal Date is beside name on  
 mailing label →

## Rifles - [Cont. from Page 4]

his apprentices were spread throughout the entire area. The products of the outstanding gunsmith of Berkley County, Martin Sheetz, and his family, who practiced throughout the Valley area, exhibit Lauck-like characteristics.

Other noted gunsmiths who worked in the Shenandoah Valley were Uriah Fisher of Frederick County and Strasburg, Christian Huffman of Woodstock, Philip Grandstaff of Edinburg, Henry Spitzer of New Market, George McGilvray of Harrisonburg, J. Sheets of Augusta County, and John Davidson and William Zollman of Rockbridge County.

After 1810, Valley gunsmiths were commercially responsible for most gun sales, except some pistols. Prior to that time merchants sold cheaper imported German and English "shot" guns.

(Note: Original longrifles made by some makers named above are on exhibit at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley in Winchester and the Luray Valley Museum in Luray. Check their websites for open days and hours.)

Article by Gene Comstock, *The Comstock Lode - Shenandoah Valley Gunsmithing*, reprinted from the Shenandoah Valley Folklife Society newsletter, Summer, 2007

## Upcoming Events

### Mark Your Calendar:

#### SCHS Annual Dinner & Program

Date: Tuesday, May 21st

Time: 6:30 PM

Where: The VFW in Edinburg, Stony Creek Blvd. at Railroad track

Program: Learn about a new folk art tradition - Barn Quilts. Sally Shomo, who creates these beautiful objects throughout the Valley, will present a program about them and about how quilts were used during the Civil War.

More details in Spring Newsletter.

#### Strasburg Heritage Program

Sunday, Feb. 18th - 2 to 4 PM **Strasburg Heritage Association Program Meeting.** Local Historian Marquetta Mitchell will present a program, Queen Street and Sunset Hills: Names Matter. The program will feature history from the local Black community and will take place at the St. Paul Lutheran Church at 156 W. Washington St. in Strasburg. The public is invited. No fee.

Sunday, March 24th at 2 p.m. **Damsels, Dollymops, and Divorcees: Women's Agency in the 19th Century.** The Clarke County Historical is presenting this interesting program at the Twin Oaks Winery at 18035 Raven Rocks Rd. in Bluemont, VA Women of the past got a bad rep -- always meek and submissive; they had no control over their lives and were subjected to the whims of their male guardians. But what if women's history was more complex than that? What if women were allowed agency? What if everything you thought about women's history is wrong?

Join CCHA Archivist Melanie Garvey to uncover the intricacies of female agency in the 19th century. Explore how women could negotiate prenup agreements and divorce settlements and how they used sex as a tool of control, even in Clarke County.

This talk is for audiences 18 years and older and will touch on mature subjects. \$20 non-members / \$15 for Members. Info: 540-955-2600