

The Pittsylvania Packet

Fall 2006

Number 62



Pittsylvania Historical Society

Chatham, Virginia

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News & Upcoming Events

PHS Membership Meeting: October 16 th , 2006	4
Callands Festival: October 7 th , 2006 <i>by Susan Worley</i>	4
Christmas in Historic Chatham: December 1 st and 2 nd , 2006	7
Death of Richard Anderson Mourned	7

Articles

Answer to the Summer Issue's Picture of the Past	7
The Little Station that Stood <i>by Glenn Giles</i>	8
Third Lieutenant Dryden Wright, Pigg River Invincibles, Co. C2, 46 th Virginia Infantry: Letters to Home—September 1863 to April 1864 (Part III, Conclusion) <i>by Stephen Thornton</i>	11

Departments

Publications for Sale	17
Membership Information	Back Cover

**Pittsylvania Historical Society
Membership Meeting
Monday Evening, October 16th, 2006
7:30pm**

Henry Mitchell, former president of the Pittsylvania Historical Society and current editor of several websites, including ChathamGuide.com and PittPaths.com, will give a talk on Chatham's historic architecture.

The meeting will be held at the 1813 Clerk's Office behind Town Hall in Chatham, Virginia.

**Callands Festival
October 7th, 2006**

by Susan Worley

Quiet and serene, the Callands Clerk's Office sees few visitors throughout the year. Birds nest in nearby trees and squirrels scamper across the lawns and into fields. This calm, though, will give way Saturday, October 7th, to a flurry of activity as a market of artisans, craftsmen and exhibitors rekindle an historic tradition — the Callands Festival.

Hoping to share the county treasures at Callands, Historical Society members James M. "Mack" Doss and Frances Hallam Hurt organized the first Callands Festival 26 years ago. Sponsored by the Pittsylvania Historical Society, the festival depicts colonial court days when men rode in from all over the county to tend to business, purchase goods, and share tales and opinions. Vendors spread out over more than an acre

offer a variety of handmade crafts. Masters of their trades are demonstrating skills of the past.

The clerk's office was built around 1770 after Pittsylvania County was cut from Halifax County in 1767. In 1966, the building was given to the people of Pittsylvania County by owners Landon E. Oakes and J. Clyde Oakes to be maintained for all to enjoy as the first official building after Pittsylvania became a county in June 1767.

After donation by the Oakes brothers, the clerk's office was restored to beauty and architectural authenticity by the Chatham Garden Club. On festival day, often called the Autumn Potpourri, the clerk's office embraces craftspeople on the lawn and also inside around the inviting fireplace.

Toe-tapping music by talented local musicians delights the crowd, a few of whom have been known from time to time to join the flavor of the day by dancing. Also on the lawn of the clerk's office is apple butter making and the production of apple cider with a hand-cranked press.

Located across the road from the Callands clerk's office is a building traditionally referred to as the Courthouse and Gaol, although its original use is inconclusive. It is believed to have been built around 1773. For certain it was a center of the community when Samuel Calland sold, bartered, and traded goods in it as a storehouse. (The building was donated to the county by the Stegall family and was restored by the Pittsylvania Historical Society with funds from the Board of Supervisors.) On festival day inside and outside are teeming with vendors offering a variety of

items, including holiday bows, dolls, wreaths, floral arrangements, and furniture.

A glance from the clerk's office reveals an impressive monument dedicated to the men who fired the guns, drove the trucks and tanks, flew the airplanes, sailed the ships, tended the wounded, buried the dead and did other jobs to keep supply lines moving during World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam. The Callands War Memorial commemorates the men who gave their life and to honor all men and women who served in a military conflict who went to schools in the old Callands District, which also included Museville, Sago, Rondo, Union Hall, Swansonville and Grady. Mr. and Mrs. Landon Oakes gave land to Pittsylvania County for the monument, and with the help of Oakes Memorial & Signs Inc., the Pittsylvania County Board of Supervisors, area churches and businesses, and a group of hard-working volunteers, the marker became a reality. The monument is eight feet tall and 10 feet wide and includes insignia from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine. Flagpoles, flying the U.S., state, and Pittsylvania County flags, enhance the memorial.

The Callands Festival stepped from the archives of treasured local history onto the platform of national acclaim in 2002 by being named a "Local Legacy" by the Library of Congress. The Local Legacies Project marks the documentation of American culture and historical heritage through a wealth of information contributed by people from all walks of life. The project includes 1,300 entries which will become part of collections in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The annual October Callands Festival was submitted for inclusion at the request of

Fifth District Congressman Virgil H. Goode, Jr. The annual festival is truly an adventure too valuable to miss.

Christmas in Historic Chatham December 1st and 2nd, 2006

The evening of Friday, December 1st, and the day of Saturday, December 2nd, will be jam-packed with activities for all ages. A children's parade and lamp-lighting ceremony will happen on Friday evening, and carriage and bus tours, book signings, concerts, exhibitions, an appearance of Santa Claus, and much more are planned for Saturday. Watch the *Star-Tribune* and other local media for more information!

Richard Anderson's Death Mourned

It is with sadness that Richard Anderson's death at age 49 is noted. Anderson was the editor for the Virginia/North Carolina Piedmont Genealogical Society's quarterly, and frequent volunteer for other activities. He was also a Yates descendant, of the family that owned Yates Tavern, near Gretna.

Last Issue's Picture of the Past

David Roach says that the car on Main Street (in the photo published in the last issue) is a 1920 or 1921 Hudson.

Another picture from the past will be featured in an upcoming issue.

The Little Station that Stood

by Glenn Giles

Every parent has read that little book entitled *The Little Engine that Could* to their children a thousand times. The sequel to this book will be written in Chatham and it will be entitled *The Little Station that Stood*. It may never be a hit with children but it should prove an inspirational story to historical preservationists. The Southern Railway Station in Chatham was built in 1918 during the heyday of railroads. For many years, the station played a significant role in the social and economic history of Pittsylvania County. It was vital to the establishment and growth of the two nationally-renowned schools located in Chatham. Chatham Hall, a college preparatory school for girls, was started in 1894. The train depot welcomed such notables as Eleanor Roosevelt. Hargrave Military Academy was started in 1909 and the boarding students and faculty at both schools relied on train transportation for travel to and from the schools. The depot brought freight and mail to the businesses in the County seat as well as farm equipment, fertilizer, and seed to the County's rich agricultural economic base. Those were the good years and the little station was admired and praised by all who used her services.

With the demise of passenger traffic in the 1960's, Southern Railway closed the depot as a passenger station in 1965 but continued to handle freight until about 1975. About this time, Southern initiated a program to demolish the now-useless passenger and freight stations along its routes, and a letter was written by the newly-organized Pittsylvania Historical Society requesting that the station be donated to the

Society's ownership. However, action descended upon Chatham in the summer of 1979 to demolish the building and this is when this saga of *The Little Station that Stood* has its beginning. When the wrecking crew arrived in Chatham it created a lot of consternation among Chatham citizens. The resulting activity was recorded in the *Star-Tribune* and the *Danville Bee* editions of August 23 and 24, 1979. A headline in the *Bee* reads, "Campaign to save old Chatham depot catches eyes of Southern president." The *Star-Tribune* began their article with this headline, "Hopes Raised for Saving Chatham's Old RR Depot."

Neil G. Payne, president of the Historical Society, wrote a letter to L. Stanley Crane, president of Southern, requesting that the station not be demolished. Crane notified the Society that he was arranging a meeting with Southern's area superintendent, J. E. Sims, to "explain the conditions under which we may give consideration to making this building available to your organization." On August 30, 1979, about 50 people turned out for a meeting in the County courthouse to discuss the fate of the station. A company representative told the group that Southern would donate the building and lease the land to any organization or governing body which was willing to erect a security fence between the depot and the railroad tracks and purchase \$1.5 million in liability insurance and keep the building in good repair. The Society took no action and Southern took no action to demolish the station until 20 years later.

Fast forward to August, 1998, and Southern Railway is now the Norfolk Southern Corporation. This time a Norfolk Southern work crew appeared at the site with orders to demolish the now-seriously-

deteriorated structure. Once again the call goes out for help, and State Senator Charles Hawkins and Congressman Virgil H. Goode, Jr. responded. The threat of demolition becomes a call for action. When a request to save the station reached the president of Norfolk Southern, he agreed to delay the station's demolition and allow another preservation effort to be formed.

On September 21, 1998, the Historical Society once again discussed the project and decided that the restoration was too large an undertaking for their organization. They passed a resolution suggesting that a community taskforce be established to save the station. Nothing was done for another eighteen months and Norfolk Southern informed the County that enough time had elapsed and some action would be required or they would have no alternative but to proceed with the demolition.

The stage can now be set for the saga of *The Little Station that Stood*. Music lovers have always heard that the opera isn't over until "the fat lady sings." Preservation projects in the Pittsylvania Historical Society are never over until "the thin lady stops singing." The Chatham train station had escaped two episodes that would have doomed it to demolition. It had been neglected by its owner, raided by vandals, taken over by vagrants, shunned by the citizens of Chatham, and its fate was left to the weather elements to assure its destruction. All of these negatives did not deter the "thin lady" from singing about the preservation need for this community icon. In January, 2001, this "thin lady," a community icon herself, Frances Hurt, contacted several prominent citizens who were also interested in preserving the old depot and this

group of Cornerstone Contributors pledged over \$35,000 for the purchase of the station.

It was another three years before an additional grant funding process had worked its course and work could proceed on the restoration of the train station. In May of 2006, contractors started the demolition of the old roof. New trusses have been installed and the roof foundation is in place. A new burgundy French tile roof will be installed in the early Fall.

The restoration of the Chatham Depot is far from over. More grant applications need to be written, matching funds from the community need to be sought, and a lot of frustration and patience endured before the community again puts this once-proud structure into useful service. When this day occurs and a celebration is held, the fact that *This Little Station Stands* will be a direct result of the energy, determination, and generosity of the remarkable “thin lady” who wouldn’t stand for the station’s destruction — Frances Hallam Hurt.

**Third Lieutenant Dryden Wright, Pigg River
Invincibles, Co. C2, 46th Virginia Infantry:
Letters to Home – September 1863 to April 1864
Part III**

by Stephen Thornton

Introduction

Dryden Wright’s letters were recently found while researching soldier letters at The Library of Virginia. They were acquired in 2003 after having been sold on the internet to a historic-minded

person who, in turn, offered them to the library. The article shows us how much information can be gleaned from four “letters to home” — much of it highly useful to the examining historian in documenting the company’s service.

Highly interested in all of the various companies that were formed from the Pigg River area, Co. C2, 46th Virginia Infantry is of intense interest to the author because of its association with a seldom-studied brigade. I am working on graduate research and writing and attempting to focus, when possible, on the county or general area. Current project includes creating a detailed map of the northwestern portion of county at 1860. Determination of public or private roads and farm locations in this area, and/or information (diaries, letters, artifacts, oral history, photos – including buildings) concerning any soldiers from the area urgently sought for assistance in current and future projects.

If you have any information to share, please contact Stephen Lee Thornton, 10218 Natural Bridge Rd., Richmond, VA, 23236 or thorntons@vcu.edu

Wright mentions his brother, Crispin Dickenson Wright, as seeking exemption from service. Private C. D. Wright had been one of the company’s original volunteers in 1861, but was discharged on January 6, 1862, apparently suffering with phthisis.¹ In late January, 1864, the Conscription Bureau called for changes in the enrolling officers and examining surgeons for each district and for reexamination of all previous exemptions or disabled discharges.² Wright is referring to the February 17, 1864 “Act to organize forces to serve during the war,” of which Section 10 listed exemption eligibilities. He is likely either referring to those listed in the first clause as “held unfit for military service, under rules to be prescribed by the Secretary of War,” or to the fourth. That clause exempted “one person as overseer or agriculturalist on each farm or plantation upon which there are . . . fifteen able-bodied field hands, between the ages of

sixteen and fifty.” Those who were granted the exemption on this clause were required to execute a bond guaranteeing delivery of a hundred pounds of bacon or pork and then an additional hundred pounds of beef “on the hoof” per above-mentioned slave. The exempted was also bound to sell all farm surpluses to the government or to soldiers’ families at fixed prices.³ Either way, he must have met exemption requirements, as he does not reappear in military service records. It is certain that at this point of the war, any man operating a productive farm was an asset to the Confederacy.

Contrary to camp rumor, the 46th Virginia was not sent to assist in Gen. Finnegan’s operations in Florida. Collins’ history documents the regiment covering Church Flats in late February and then leaving Adam’s Run for Richmond on May 5.⁴ Wright’s next letter finds the company on detached service from the regiment once again, documenting a previously-unknown or overlooked part of their service.

John’s Island So. Ca
April 4th 1864

Dr Pa. I have been waiting some time thinking I could have the pleasure of talking with you instead of writing but I do not know now that I will see you or have that pleasure soon and consequently I have concluded to write you a few lines to let you know how I am getting along +c. I made application a week ago for thirty days which is the usual time granted to Officers or at least that time has given to a good many Officers who wished to attend to business and to day mine came in for fifteen days only and I do not think I shall accept or use it unless I can get it extended

by Genl Wise or that is by his recommendation. I expect to get a pass in a few days and go and see him on the subject personally and if he is not willing that I shall have a longer time I think I shall give him back the furlough that I have now for fifteen days. I have no news of interest to write times are very quiet at present. three companies besides ours are at present guarding the outpost of the Island and digging Rifle pits in 2 1/2 or 3 miles from the enemy's pickets who are on a Small Island adjacent to this called Keiwar.⁵ No prospects for an engagement soon unless the enemy should attempt to surprise us at night which I think is not likely to — happen. We are faring tolerably well as to something to eat. We get as many Oysters as we can use with very little trouble. The Boys have just landed with a load so I must haste and help to enjoy them I would like to know if you have any very particular business with me! If I knew you had I would come on fifteen days leave if I thought you wished it. but however be assured I will use every effort to get home as soon as I can if I can get time enough to justify my coming. I would like very much indeed to come now but I know if I do on fifteen days leave it will be counted as a leave of course and I cannot get off again until all the Officers in the Regt have been furloughed and I am unwilling to accept one for fifteen days to tie off with others of thirty days. I have already been cheated to some extent. What have you done with your old Confederate money? With my best wishes +c. I must close. give my love to all.

Your Affectionate Son
D. Wright⁶

Wright was incensed that his leave was granted for only fifteen days, understandably so when it is considered that about a week of his time would have been spent in traveling to and from home. Although he did not take action as far as he threatened, Confederate soldier memoirs and reminiscences are replete with such instances of the men resisting governmental and military authority on personal points of honor or fairness. Wright instead respectfully submitted that fifteen days did not allow sufficient time to attend to business and asked for an extension to thirty days, which Captain John R. Yeatts endorsed and forwarded on April 8. Wise approved the extension for Wright on April 9, but only to twenty days — giving him just enough time to return before Wise’s Brigade was called to defend Richmond.⁷ Wright refers to the February 17, 1864 “Act to reduce the currency and to authorize a new issue of notes and bonds,” which required all previously-issued Confederate Treasury notes to be turned in starting April 1. Beyond that date hundred-dollar notes were no longer legal tender, yet could be turned in for bonds payable after twenty years at four percent interest. Notes that were not turned in by April 1 underwent a schedule of devaluation that reached zero on January 1, 1865. Five-dollar notes were subject to a similar schedule starting July 1, 1864.⁸

The regiment pulled out of the Charleston defenses on May 5 and arrived at Petersburg four days later. They would finally see action on May 16 at Port Walthall Junction and performed well under fire. In the next few weeks, they participated in the “bottling up” of Federal Major General Benjamin Butler on the Bermuda Hundred peninsula behind the Howlett Line. They were relieved from duty on June 3 and headed

over to the Dunn farm, east of Petersburg. Nearby, on the Dimmock Line, the regiment again saw action during the nearly-successful Federal raid on the city of June 9. They were among the small Confederate force that resisted the initial Federal attacks on Petersburg from June 15 through June 18 as Confederate General Robert E. Lee hesitated east of Richmond — unconvinced that Federal General U. S. Grant was crossing the James River.⁹ The fighting on June 17 proved to be particularly hard on the company and the regiment as a whole. The Pigg River Invincibles suffered twenty of the 46th Virginia's 131 casualties on that day.¹⁰ Wright missed that week of intense action due to illness; his record states that he was admitted to Episcopal Church Hospital on June 9, transferred on June 18, and then admitted to General Hospital Danville with debilitas on July 5. He was then sent out to private quarters (home) on July 10, from which he returned July 30. First Lieutenant James D. Davis had been mortally wounded at the Webb Farm on June 17 and Wright was promoted *in absentia* to fill the position on June 24. While at Danville, Wright missed the Battle of the Crater on July 30, in which the brigade held the portion of the line just to the right of the exploded mine under Elliott's Salient. Sent back to the Petersburg trenches from Danville on August 9, it is not certain that he made it back there — bi-monthly reports state that he was absent sick at the end of August and October.¹¹

It is unclear when Wright finally returned to duty, but he is listed as commanding the company on the December 1864 and February 1865 reports, a period during which Captain Yeatts was absent for much of the time. Although he had missed the hardest of the fighting outside of Petersburg, Wright was present for

the company's final trials at Hatcher's Run, Deep Creek and Marshall's Crossroads, during which the company lost over fifty percent in casualties.¹² After enduring the whole experience of Lee's Retreat, he was among the twenty-one Pigg River Invincibles who stacked arms and were paroled at Appomattox Court House on April 12, 1865. Wright returned to farming in Pittsylvania and later served as delegate from his district in the General Assembly from December 1887 to March 1888. He died of nephritis at his home near Sandy Level on May 21, 1918.¹³

(1) CSR, 46th Virginia, LVA. If it was correctly diagnosed, "phthisis" was probably pulmonary tuberculosis. Private C. D. Wright was among about half of the company that was left "sick" at White Sulphur Springs Hospital after the retreat from Charleston, West(ern) Virginia — likely broken down after the grueling eight-day ordeal. It is doubtful that he ever returned to duty before being discharged from there in January.

(2) *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series IV, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1880-1901, v. 3, 57.

(3) *Ibid.*, 178-81. If the plantation's labor force remained as it was in 1860, 22 of Joseph Wright's slaves met the age requirements. If meat could not be provided, equal value in grains or other farm produce was allowable. Delivery was to be made at government depots — some "railroad . . . or such other place or places . . . designated by the Secretary of War." Could one of these places be Isaac H. Watson's Willow Del Plantation, site of a secret commissary?

(4) Collins, 46th Virginia, 49, 52.

(5) Kiawah Island. It is unclear as to exactly where Wright is referring to, though likely on the Bohicket road near the site of the previous-mentioned action in February.

(6) Wright Letters, LVA.

(7) CSR, 46th Virginia, LVA

(8) *Official Records*, Series IV, v. 3, 159-61. The "new issue" notes referred to are the common red and blue "two years after" notes.

(9) Collins, 46th Virginia, 52-60.

(10) *Ibid.*, 84, 88. Company C: 5 Killed or Mortally Wounded, 14 Wounded, 1 Captured. 46th Virginia: 25 Killed or Mortally Wounded, 87 Wounded, 19 Captured. Most casualties in Cos. A, B, C, F.

(11) CSR, 46th Virginia, LVA. Whether or not it was accurately done so, Wright's affliction was diagnosed as "syphilis" at Episcopal Church Hospital. The diagnosis of "debilitas" at Danville, likely more accurate, describes a general weakened conditioned. An original volunteer and

former Third Sergeant, Davis died of his wounds on June 24. Second Lieutenant Henry G. Reynolds, original volunteer and former Fourth Sergeant, was killed in action on June 17. Second Sergeant Abraham M. Wright, original volunteer and former Third Corporal, was elected Second Lieutenant on July 1, 1864. Captain John R. Yeatts was wounded in action, but apparently did not go to the hospital until the elections were held on July 1 — Abraham Wright commanded during Yeatts' convalescence and Dryden's absence. Private Joseph T. Towler, also an original volunteer, was elected Third Lieutenant on July 1, 1864. Nearly every non-commissioned officer in the company was promoted at least one rank due to the elections.

(12) CSR, 46th Virginia, LVA; Collins, 46th Virginia, 69-75, 84. The majority of the casualties were fourteen captured on April 6, 1865 at Marshall's Crossroads. Total from Hatcher's Run to Farmville on the retreat was 27. For a thorough examination of Marshall's Crossroads see Greg Eanes, "Black Day of the Army": April 6, 1865, in *The Battles of Sailor's Creek*, E & H Publishing, Burkeville, 2001.

(13) CSR, 46th Virginia, LVA; Collins, 46th Virginia, 81-2; Stuart, 1870 Census Index, 4:3776; Cynthia Miller Leonard, *The General Assembly of Virginia: July 30, 1619 – January 11, 1978* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1978), 546; Virginia Bureau of Vital Statistics, *Death Certificates (post-1912)*, 1912-1939. Accession 36390. State Government Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. Nephritis is an inflammation of the kidneys.

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, <http://www.chathambooks.us/>

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, 26 North Main Street, Chatham,
VA 24531, 434-432-1400, hhurt@adelphia.net, [http://www.
ShadetreeRareBooks.com](http://www.ShadetreeRareBooks.com)

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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.

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) Sug-
gested 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*
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Herman Melton, *Thirty-Nine Lashes Well Laid On: Crime and
Punishment in Southside Virginia 1750—1950* (Hardcover)
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Judge Langhorne Jones, *Tales from a Small Town* (Softcover)
Suggested Retail Price: \$5.