

The Pittsylvania Packet

Fall 2007

Number 66



Pittsylvania Historical Society

Chatham, Virginia

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**“Musical Traditions from Pittsylvania County”
Fall PHS Membership Meeting
Monday Evening, October 15, 2007 at 7:00 PM
near Gretna, Virginia**

The Pittsylvania Historical Society wishes to invite members and guests to our Monday, October 15 meeting at Yates Tavern, which will begin at 7:00 PM. The program will feature music by Jeremy Stephens. Jeremy, a Pittsylvania County native, will play traditional and historical music selections on antique instruments. The annual election of officers and directors will also be held.

Yates Tavern is located on the west side of US 29 Business South just on the edge of Gretna (10 miles north of Chatham and 30 miles north of Danville).

**27th Annual Callands Festival
Saturday, October 6, 2007**

The annual Callands Festival will be held on Saturday, October 6, 2007. Crafts, food, music, and reenactors always help to make the Callands Festival a fun experience!

The historic buildings at Callands will be open to visitors. Pittsylvania Historical Society books and wares will be available for purchase.

To get to Callands from Danville drive north 11 miles on Franklin Turnpike (Rt. 41) to (dead end) right on Rt. 57. Then (across from Callands Fire Department) left on Rt. 969, the Sago/Museville Road. The Callands site is just around a curve (3/10 of a mile or so). From Chatham it is about 10 minutes west on Rt. 57 (Depot St.) then right on Rt. 969, the Sago/ Museville Road.

**Virginia Genealogical Society Fall Conference
Roanoke, Virginia
November 2-3, 2007**

The Virginia Genealogical Society's fall conference will focus on Southwest Virginia history. The migration patterns in and out of southwest Virginia will be one of the topics discussed (some of those leaving southwest Virginia came to Pittsylvania County). The speakers include Mary B. Kegley, Craig R. Scott, and Laura S. Wickstead. A free reception will be given on Friday evening, November 2 at the O. Winston Link Museum in Roanoke. Tickets to the programs on November 3 cost \$45 (or \$40 for Virginia Genealogy Society members) and must be purchased by October 22. For more information, contact VGS Fall Conference, 1900 Byrd Ave., Suite 104, Richmond, VA 23230-3033.

Christmas in Historic Chatham
Friday, December 7 and Saturday, December 8, 2007

On Friday evening, December 7 the annual lantern lighting and yule log burning will be held, as well as various other events. On Saturday, December 8 concerts, a parade, an art auction, and tours are planned. On both days, local businesses are planning special events, and vendors will be on the streets.

[All information is subject to change. Please check media articles closer to December.]

Advertisement from the Past:
1903 Barber Shop

Christopher Lewis, First-Class Barber, Main St., Chatham, VA.

Shop handsomely furnished. Hair cutting, shaving and shampooing done in the best manner. I have just fitted up a nice BATHROOM, and the public can be supplied with hot or cold baths at any time. Call on me at the lower room in Carter's hotel.

- Advertisement in *The Pittsylvania Tribune*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 5, Friday, July 31, 1903, Chatham, VA. Courtesy Linda Yeatts Brown, Virginia Beach, VA.

Chatham Depot Baggage Cart Restored

by Glenn Giles



One of the baggage carts used for decades by Southern Railway employees at the Chatham Depot has been donated to the Pittsylvania Historical Society and restored to its original operational condition.

This cart was purchased by local businessman Tommy Geyer when the depot was closed for passenger service in the 1960's. He had developed a personal and sentimental connection to the cart when, as a youth growing up on Whittle Street, he often pulled and rode the cart around

the Depot platform. Geyer used the cart as a mount for an advertising sign when he owned and operated Tightsqueeze Corners in Tightsqueeze.

Over the years, weather had taken its toll on the cart's condition. The wood decking had totally rotted away and the carriage and metal components, while still present, were rusted and corroded.

Geyer's donation of the cart and payment of the cost of restoration was contingent upon its restoration and exhibition at the Chatham Depot. Two local craftsmen, Danny Walker and Ed Gregson, volunteered their services, equipment, and facilities to perform the restoration. They took the cart components to Danny's shop on Chalk Level Road. Danny cleaned, sandblasted, and primed all the metal parts. Ed Gregson purchased replacement bolts and treated lumber for the deck. They then followed structural measurements to reassemble the carriage parts and construct the deck. The cart was painted to match the original paint colors of the vehicle. The hard rubber tires and the counter-levered tongue are prominent features of the restored cart.

Baggage carts were used by all railroads and express firms at every depot in the country to move goods and luggage around their depots. A 1928 photograph of the Chatham Depot shows three baggage carts in the background. There are many Chatham citizens who recall

railroad employee, Ted Byrd, who pulled the baggage cart to meet all the trains to receive and send mail from the Chatham location. This is perhaps the same cart he used for those many years.

Motorized carts and trailers replaced the hand powered carts, therefore not many exist today. For this reason, the Pittsylvania Historical Society is grateful for the generous contribution by the Geyer family and the skilled labor provided by Danny Walker and Ed Gregson. This cart represents a cherished link to the social and economic heritage of Chatham and Pittsylvania County.

Yates Tavern

In July of 1983, research was done on Yates Tavern by fifth, sixth and seventh grade students at John L. Hurt, Jr. Elementary School through the Pittsylvania County Gifted program. Those students participating in the summer program were Sheila Dawson, Christie Dawson, Tanya Jones, Kenneth Dawson, Blaine Eades, Cindy Dinkle, Eleanor Kent, Shelby Duffer, Martin Kent, Tracy Epperson, Suzanne Hunt, Verna Moon, Lorie Dalton, and Vitrina Patrick. Teachers for the program were Mrs. Patsy Nuckols, a seventh grade teacher at Hurt Ele-

mentary, and Miss Sandra Frazier, an itinerant teacher of the gifted in Pittsylvania County.

The following article is the results of their research:

A tavern in the 18th century was a communication center and way station for express riders, wagoneers, and troops. Taverns were also called public houses, ordinaries, and inns. Most taverns were found near a ferry or a busy crossroads. A tavern was a local meeting place. Many parties, dances, and debates were held in taverns. Sometimes they were used for courthouses or even jails. A good tavern consisted of sanded floors, a large parlor with a fireplace, a bar at one side, plenty of benches, tables, chairs, and sleeping quarters for travelers. This is an example of a tavern price list in Virginia (a shilling is equivalent to 5 new pennies; a pence is equivalent to 1 penny):

Breakfast and dinner (if hot) — 1 shilling

Lodging per person per night — 6 pence

Stablage per horse per night — 6 pence

Corn or oats per gallon — 6 pence

At one time, Pittsylvania County had four taverns [editor's note: more taverns have been identified]: Beaver Tavern, Brown Tavern, Wards Tavern, and Yates Tavern. Yates Tavern is the only one that has been

restored. This tavern is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Yates Tavern is located near Gretna, once called Elba, on Rt. 29 near Whitethorn Creek. The building is thought to have been built around 1750. It is a five room block house with a tack room. The tavern is not a true block house because true block houses have four jetties (overhangs that measure twelve inches wide). Yates Tavern has only two overhangs which measure ten inches wide.

Around 1850 Stephen Yates [or probably a later owner] added a wing to the house, which later burned. This wing was never rebuilt.

The measurements of the main room are 18 by 20 feet. This room contains a fireplace with a mantle piece made out of a joist, a large wooden beam. The mantle weighs about sixty pounds. The adjoining room contains a small storage closet which is under a steep, bending stairway. This room was probably used by the owner and his wife for sleeping. The room measures 16 by 18 feet.

The house has many interesting aspects. It was for this reason that DeWitt Wallace donated money for the restoration of Yates Tavern. The basement floor is soapstone, although according to one newspaper article the floors were dirt. The walls are of rock and are

approximately two feet thick. The windows in the house are made of hand-blown glass. There is a small door in the main room that opens onto the front porch so wood could be brought inside without stepping outside. In the small adjoining room there is a trap door that leads to the basement by way of a ladder where the food was cooked and the liquor was made. . . . In the stairway door a small chunk was cut for a cat to pass through.

The first owners of the land on which Yates Tavern sits were traced back to Thomas Davis and William Porter. Joseph Robertson bought land from William Porter. Samuel Yates purchased land from Joseph Robertson and Thomas Davis. It is not known on which piece of land the Tavern sat. In 1804 John Lewis took out a license to run a tavern at the block house which was another name for Yates Tavern. From 1818 to 1835 Samuel Yates obtained yearly licenses for a house of private entertainment. William Yates got the land after Samuel Yates. William Yates sold the land to Nancy Boswell for \$600. Phenias Owen bought the land from Nancy Boswell. Phenias died and the land went to his wife, E. F. Owen. Eliza F. Owen was married again, this time to Booker D. Bennett.

Christina V. Adams, wife of Samuel Adams, obtained the land from Booker D. Bennett. William Dickinson was made trustee of the land for Christina V. Adams. Adams sold the land to L. E. Spencer. Dr. A. N. Nuckols and

wife, Sally, bought the land from L. E. Spencer for \$1,350. Dr. A. N. Nuckols and wife sold the land to James G. Bennett for \$3,000. J. Eddie Bennett and Nannie B. Cocke looked after their father, James G. Bennett, and in return received his land as a gift.

[Editor's note: Mamie Ritter wrote in 1937 an alternate list of the owners: Edward Marlow (purchased 1798), Samuel Yates (1798), Washington Yates (1840), Samuel Adams (1878), W. V. Dickerson (1883), L. E. Spencer (1886), Dr. A. N. Nuchols (1893), and James G. Burnett (1907).]

Nannie B. Cocke received the portion of land on which Yates Tavern sits. Mrs. Cocke deeded Yates Tavern and twenty-five feet on each side to Pittsylvania County for \$1.00 in 1975. F. A. Keatts, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, accepted this gift for the county. William Bowler, owner of the sawmill adjoining the Yates Tavern property, recognized the historical importance of the deteriorating tavern. Bowler used his own materials to prevent the further deterioration of the building.

In 1976, Dewitt Wallace, owner, founder, and publisher of *Reader's Digest*, gave a gift of \$12,500 to aid in the restoration of Yates Tavern. The Virginia Historic Landmark Commission gave \$10,000. The

Pittsylvania County Board of Supervisors contributed \$122,500.

A number of people donated time and energy to aid in the restoration of Yates Tavern. The Virginia Highway Department seeded the banks and yard surrounding the tavern. W. Camden Whitehead, funded by the Pittsylvania Bicentennial Commission, was responsible for cleaning, filling and grading the site. Mrs. Langhorne Jones suggested the planting of trees to separate Yates Tavern from the sawmill. Richard W. Arey dug up fifty cedars from his own farm. They were planted by Camp 15 under the supervision of Robert L. Hedrick, principal of John L. Hurt, Jr. Elementary School. The Gretna Fire Department took the responsibility of watering the trees.

Building parts needed for the restoration of Yates Tavern were taken from nearby county buildings. Hugh Davis of Laurel Grove donated cedar beams for the loft. The slotted and notched beams were put in place in Yates Tavern with the same 200 year old pegs that had been removed from Davis' building. The loft and main floors came from Sarah McNeal's cabin at Red Oak Hollow and Davis' house. [Parts from] Lee Junior School, Rodenhizer house, and others were used in the restoration of Yates Tavern.

Only one strap hinge on the outside door was original to the tavern. Charles Dove made the other hinges to

match the original. The original rocks were used to rebuild the foundation and chimney. Only two of the original boards were suitable for use in the restoration.

The Yates Tavern Committee was formed in 1977 with Robert C. Vaden, Chairman. He along with the other committee members: Mrs. Floyd Bennett, Peggy Crawley, Edmond Fitzgerald, Haile V. Fitzgerald, Mrs. C. B. Hunt, Jr., Wayne Motley, Col. Max Nemky, Mrs. Edmond Ramsey, Mrs. Carrington Thompson, Major Neal Payne, Harry Lee Reynolds, and Mrs. Henry C. Hurt, met twice a year to organize activities for Yates Tavern and to take care of the contributions received for the tavern.

The Committee had an Open House on New Year's Day in 1977 for people to tour the tavern. This having been a big success, they decided to have Open House every Sunday through the summer months. [Editor's note: this practice has since ceased.] The tavern was also available for any special group who wanted to come in and tour the unique building The Yates Tavern Committee of 1983 consists of the following people: Peggy Crawley, Chairman, Garnett Aylor, Floyd Bennett, Edmond Fitzgerald, Mr. and Mrs. Kent Harris, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hedrick, Mrs. C. D. Hunt, Jr., Mrs. Henry C. Hurt, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Ingram, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Jefferson, Col. Max Nemky, Mr. J. R. Pearson, Mrs. Edmond F. Ramsey, Major Neal Payne and Robert C.

Vaden. This committee meets when there is a need to discuss projects or activities to be held at the tavern. At the . . . meeting held in April 1983, their discussion was centered around the Board of Supervisors' having agreed to get the tavern painted.

Pittsylvania Ponders Secession before the Civil War

At a meeting of citizens held at Cascade, irrespective [sic] of party, on Wednesday, Dec. 26th instant [1860], the following preamble and resolutions were passed without a dissenting voice:

Whereas, in the present distracted condition of the country, it becomes all true patriots to do what lies in their power, to adjust all grievances that may exist among the different portions of our common country. And, whereas, it is manifest that the Southern portion of this Confederacy, has various and just causes of complaint against the Northern portion of this same Confederacy — this meeting would, therefore, express its opinion of the existing in the following resolutions, viz:

1. Resolved, That whilst we acknowledge the existence of various and just causes of complaint,

on the part of the Southern against the Northern States of this Confederacy, we still deprecate and dissent from the hasty and ill-advised course pursued by South Carolina in separating herself from her sister States of the Union.

2. Resolved, That for the purpose of securing a redress of all causes of complaint against the North we would suggest a convention of all the Southern States, in order that they may set forth all just causes of complaint against the North, and demand full and ample redress for the same.

3. Resolved, That if, upon such a demand for redress upon the North, we are unable to obtain such full and perfect redress of existing grievances as we may think ourselves justly entitled to, then we, *with the entire South*, are willing to pledge “our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor,” to fight for all and every right we claim under the federal compact, *in the Union of the States*.

4. Resolved, That the proceedings of this meeting be sent to the Danville papers and to the Richmond “Whig” and “Enquirer,” for publication.

JOS. TROTTER, Chairman
GREENBURY THORNTON, Sec’y

*Editor's Note: as Herman Melton points out in **Southside Virginia: Echoing Through History**, 2,242 Pittsylvanians (including 100 individuals in Cascade) voted to secede from the Union on May 23, 1861. How quickly circumstances can bring change!*

From "Public Meeting in Pittsylvania," *Richmond Enquirer*, Vol. LVII, No. 62, Tuesday Morning, January 1, 1861, Richmond, VA. Also see Herman Melton, *Southside Virginia: Echoing Through History*, History Press, Charleston, SC, 2006, pp. 66-67.

Pittsylvania Historical Society Books

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) 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.

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

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>

Shadetree Rare Books, 26 South Main Street, Chatham, VA 24531-0994, 434-432-1400, hhurt@adelphia.net,
<http://www.ShadetreeRareBooks.com>