

# *The Pittsylvania Packet*

Summer 2005

Number 57



**Pittsylvania Historical Society**

**Chatham, Virginia**

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Please send articles, letters, queries, etc. for publication to:

Sarah E. Mitchell, Editor  
Pittsylvania Historical Society  
P. O. Box 1148  
Chatham, VA 24531

You can also contact me at 434-432-0595, or at [sarahmitchell@vintagedesigns.com](mailto:sarahmitchell@vintagedesigns.com).

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## **Announcement Concerning the Melton Historical Fund**

A little over eighteen months ago, the Pittsylvania Historical Society announced the establishment of the Herman and Helen Melton Historical Fund with The Community Foundation of the Dan River Region. The Melton Historical Fund was created to support historical research and preservation in the Pittsylvania County area.

Now applications for the first grants are being taken. Applicants may include 501(c)3 charitable organizations or individual researchers. Researchers can be part of a formal educational research program or be independent researchers who agree to present a final summary of their research suitable for publication by the Pittsylvania Historical Society. One or more grants of up to \$1,000 are available this year.

Interested applicants should contact The Community Foundation of the Dan River Region for more information. Applications must be postmarked by August 1, 2005.

The Historical Society encourages organizations and individuals to further support the fund with additional donations. Gifts should include a note stating that the contribution is for the Melton Historical Fund and should be mailed to The Community Foundation, P. O. Box 1039, Danville, VA 24543.

For more information on the Melton Historical Fund and the Community Foundation, contact the Foundation office at 434-793-0884, write the above address, or visit <http://www.cfdr.org/> .

- The PHS Board

**Annual Pittsylvania Historical Society Picnic  
Monday Evening, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005  
6:00pm**

The Summer Picnic will be held on Monday, July 18<sup>th</sup>, starting at 6:00 PM at the Frances Hurt Park behind Town Hall and the 1813 Clerk's Office. There is no charge, but donations will be accepted. Please bring your own chairs and blankets. Planned entertainment includes a string-pickin' by a bluegrass band.

**Saunders' Family Reunion  
July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

The descendants of William Robert Saunders (1850-1918) and Daniel Thomas Saunders (1844-1927), two brothers who married two sisters, Kizziah Pike English and Keron H. English, will hold a reunion on Saturday, July 30, 2005 at 12 noon at Mt. Ivy Christian Church at 5120 Scruggs Road (Route 616) in Franklin County, near Bernard's Landing at Smith Mt. Lake.

Bring a dish to share. Drinks and paper products will be furnished. For further information, contact Linda Yeatts Brown, 1713 Prodan Lane, Virginia Beach, VA 23543, (757) 430-6789, lybrown @ whro.net, or Anne Skelley in Roanoke at (540) 774-6672.

**Handmade Crafters Needed  
for Callands Festival  
October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1005**

The Callands Festival is being held for the 25<sup>th</sup> year, and a special call is going out to those who make crafts by hand who would like to either sell their crafts or demonstrate their skills. For

details on reserving space at the festival, please write to Mack Doss, 450 Oak Forest Circle, Danville, VA 24540 by September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005.

### **Deadline for Submissions**

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

### **Historical Society Receives State Grant**

During the most recent session of the State Legislature, Senator Charles Hawkins and Delegate Robert Hurt submitted an appropriation request for a nonstate grant to the Pittsylvania Historical Society for the Chatham Depot Restoration Project. The purchase and restoration of the old Southern Railway Depot is an ongoing activity of the Historical Society through the project sponsorship of the Pittsylvania County Board of Supervisors.

Nonprofit organizations and units of local government are referred to as 'nonstate entities' and appropriations are made by the Legislature for cultural and community projects throughout the Commonwealth. The Department of Historical Resources (DHR) will administer the 2006 grants to nonstate entities.

The Historical Society has been notified that an appropriation request of \$12,500 has been authorized for fiscal year 2006. The \$12,500 grant must be matched, dollar for dollar, with cash and/or in-kind donations of goods and/or services by the Historical Society.

The Pittsylvania Historical Society is sending

an appeal to its members, community citizens, civic organizations, local businesses, and contractors to make donations or provide services that will assist in the matching fund requirement.

Donations may be sent to Pittsylvania Historical Society, P. O. Box 1148, Chatham, VA 24531. For in-kind services please contact Langhorne Jones, Jr. (434-432-9261) or Glenn Giles (434-836-3252).

## **July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1860 in Chatham**

**by Sarah E. Mitchell**

*The information in the following article came from the July 11<sup>th</sup> and July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1860 issues of the **Democratic Appeal** of Danville, Virginia, copies of which were found on a microfilm at the Virginia/North Carolina Piedmont Genealogical Society.*

### **A Parade to Start the Day**

July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1860 in Chatham was a lovely day — one that was all that could be desired “as to beauty and clearness,” according to one person who was present. The first event of the day was a parade of the “bold soldier boys” of Company A, 101<sup>st</sup> Regiment, commanded by Captain W. H. Werth. (Many of the men in Company A had favored going to Danville to participate in events to be held there in honor of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, but were convinced by the ladies of the town to stay in Chatham instead.)

The parade participants assembled at 9:30 A. M., and the men marched off at 10 A. M. for the Baptist Church. (Although none of the articles specify the starting point of the parade, one could reasonably speculate that it was the present-day

Courthouse, which had just been built in 1858. The Baptist Church mentioned, now demolished, had been built in 1857 on North Main Street across from today's Old Dutch Supermarket.)

When the men and the townspeople arrived at the Baptist Church, the meeting began with a prayer by the Rev. Mr. Mathews. The Rev. W. S. Penick gave some "eloquent and appropriate remarks" and read the Declaration of Independence.

Then the ladies of the town, with the Honorable William M. Tredway as their spokesman, presented the men of Company A with a banner. Capt. Werth accepted the banner on behalf of the company.

After that, one of Chatham's veterans of the War of 1812, Colonel George Townes "arose and in a few very feeling and eloquent remarks gave a brief account of his own experience as a soldier . . . ." Colonel John L. White was also asked to speak, but declined. The assembled crowd then gave "[s]ix hearty cheers and two tigers" for Cols. White and Townes.

### **On to a Barbecue!**

The men of Company A next marched to the "race track spring where a most sumptuous barbacue [sic] had been prepared by Mr. James Carter." (Many of the townspeople accompanied the men out to the race track area.) Before the meal commenced, the men gave a drill; a viewer commented "although we have seen them drill much better, yet the corps did very well under the circumstances." (Perhaps the heat, or hunger, or the presence of liquor affected the men.)

After the drill, the "most excellent dinner" was eaten. What fish, fowl, or beast was barbecued

on this occasion was not noted — but other accounts of barbecues in the 19<sup>th</sup> century South record that whole hogs, beeves, etc. were cooked on spits over fires and then devoured.

### **A Jousting Tournament**

When dinner was finished, the gentlemen and ladies amused themselves for a time by walking in the woods, “chatting under the arbor,” etc. Then a drum roll was given to summon all to a jousting tournament to be held at the race track.

Four gentleman were to ride: John L. Hurt, Esq., was Knight of Company A; George W. Hall, Jr., Esq., Knight of the Union; Johnson Craft, Esq., Knight of the Seceders; and R. W. White, Esq., Knight of the Slippers. As one spectator stated, “At the tap of the drum, they [the men] mounted, eager for the fray. Then commenced the struggle, each inspired by the smiles of the fair lady” who was each gentleman’s favorite.

Although the articles do not explain very much about the competition, evidently the horsemen attempted to thread a lance or similar implement through a ring, for John L. Hurt “was declared the victor, having taken the ring three times successively.” George Hall came in second in the competition, Johnson Craft third, and R. W. White fourth.

### **A Prison Break in Chatham**

While many of the citizens of Chatham were enjoying themselves out of town, three men — Charles T. Clay, Yewell (or Uell) S. Brooks, and a Mr. Hutchins — who were being held in the prison at Chatham decided to take advantage of the peace and quiet of the town and break out of jail. They managed their escape “by shoving back the bolts of

the jail door with a broom-stick"; the bolts were "worn by age" so that "they [were] easily removed."

Mr. Hutchins was serving six months for an unspecified crime. Charles T. Clay, who had dark hair, a dark complexion, a scar on one hand, and stood 5 feet 5 or 6 inches, was in jail awaiting trial for the "homicide of free negro Reamy Burnett at Harvey & Walker's saw mill." Yewell/Uell S. Brooks, who had light hair, stood 5 feet 2 or 3 inches, talked "very low," and was "very stout, with a fat full face" was awaiting trial for breaking into and stealing goods from Ramsey, Witcher, & Co.'s store in Pittsylvania County.

### **An Evening Ball**

After the jousting tournament was over, the townspeople returned to Chatham to prepare for a ball which was to be held at Griggs' Hotel at 9 P. M. (Probably Sheriff A. J. Whitehead, Deputy Sheriff Jos. Blair, and some of the other county employees had to attend to the matter of beginning a search for the prison escapees.)

In the words of one of the ball-goers, "At 9 [P. M.] the ball commenced and never have we, in our short experience[,] seen a gayer or more beautiful assemblage of the fair daughters of the old [sic] Dominion." The first order of business of the evening was naming John L. Hurt, the winner of the tournament, as King of the Ball. Hurt picked a Miss Smith "as partner of his honors. She was crowned with a few appropriate remarks by Capt. Werth. Then came the supper which was a very elegant affair. After that, the rest of the evening was spent in dancing, promenading, love-making & c., until the lateness of the hour warned us 'twas time to depart, and each and every one [sic] left pleased and more than pleased with the efforts of the soldiers in making the day pleasant."

## **After the Fourth**

An update a week later on the matter of the three jail escapees revealed that Mr. Hutchins had been quickly found and returned to jail. Charles Clay and Uell Brooks still had not been recaptured; there was a \$25 reward to anyone who captured Clay or Brooks and delivered either man to the Pittsylvania County sheriff or to any jail in the state of Virginia.

Despite the prison break, the day was considered a rousing success: “It was a day that will long be remembered by the people of Chatham and the surrounding neighborhood. Long may the gallant members of Company A deserve the smiles and approbation of the ladies which were so freely bestowed on that day. . . .”

## **Hobo Lot**

By Frances Hallam Hurt

The lively town of Hurt has a long forgotten sibling with a colorful past. It's not at all unlike the mad cousin hidden in the attic. It is a small piece of land on the outskirts of the village called the Hobo Lot.

The Hobo Lot was recently rediscovered by Jeffrey Blaesing, a furniture designer who, with his wife Karen, bought the old flour mill at Hurt as office space. Mrs. Blaesing, an artist, teaches art, utilizing the bright, light, airy upper floors as a gallery and studio. She says the conversion from flour mill to studio was as painful as giving birth.

In researching the background before buying the property, the Blaesings found that in 1920, Major John L. Hurt had deeded .218 acres to the

Town of Hurt for the express use of hobos who often swung off the Southern Railway train when it stopped at Hurt. Their customary destination was just a hop and a skip away, around the first curve of the tracks and up a hill. That's the spot that became the town's Hobo Lot.

If the Hobo Lot did not have all the comforts of home, it had plenty of amenities — five lovely clear springs and rich garden plots prepared by Major Hurt. There the hobos could make out nicely until frost.

Major Hurt, whose home, Clement Hill, was nearby, established the Town of Hurt. He built, rented, or sold the houses which are part of the village, as he called it. The village now has a population of about 1,300. The village was then further cultivated by Major Hurt's nephew, also John L. Hurt, who turned down offers from distillers who envisioned that the springs bubbling at the Hobo Lot could produce great whiskey.

John L. Hurt, Jr., ran a tight township. He required that each house be built with a concrete foundation, a tin roof, and set on large plots. They are still fine houses today.

Clement Hill served as headquarters for old Major Hurt, as he lived there, but he mortally got around. He kept a room at the Hotel Burton in Danville, one at the Chatham Hotel, and another at the Virginian in Lynchburg. Southern Railway trains conveniently ran along these points several times a day. Among old Major Hurt's wide acquaintances was Nancy Langhorne, Lady Astor, whose family lived in Danville. A favorite story is that on one of Lady Astor's visits back to the area, the train on which she was traveling made a special stop at Hurt so the Major could board and greet his friend Lady Astor.

John L. Hurt, Jr., as he was known, sold property to Burlington Mills to give jobs to the people of Hurt. He also donated land for the beautiful Wayside Park on Highway 29, as well as land for the Hurt Elementary School, its library, its tennis courts and its gardens. He also gave the land for the Catholic Church in Hurt, in honor of his wife Madeline.

John Hurt's funny little office still stands where for years he served as magistrate for Pittsylvania County. His great great nephew, Delegate Robert Hurt, each year presents a scholarship in his memory from the Hurt family to a college-bound student from Northern Pittsylvania.

Meanwhile, Jeffrey and Karen Blaesing are fielding offers for the acquisition of their refurbished flour mill, including the Hobo Lot, but — so far — no offers from distillers.

## **The Old Whitefall House**

by James (Mack) Doss

It seems like only yesterday that this old frame house stood stately in a rural part of Pittsylvania County — shaded by big oak trees, mimosas with their pink blossoms, and fruit and nut trees bearing pecans, apples, pears, and peaches.

I remember most the simplicity of this haven that an eleven-year-old boy called home. It was in December, in the early fifties, several days before Christmas when this poor family of sharecroppers moved from the four-room house near Mt. Airy to this place that would be our shelter from life's

storms until the death of our dear mother in July 1978.

This old, white-framed structure was interesting from the outside, but this freckled-faced lad found it to be both interesting and intriguing on the inside. Large rooms, high ceilings, and the two porches gave it a regal air, quite a contrast to the previous place of abode on the Lena Edwards farm at Mt. Airy. The front porch would always get a fresh coat of paint in the spring, making the old metal chairs look even more worn than they already were. The old boards were easy to paint — even a child could muster this task. The reviving of the old chairs was a little more painstaking and time-consuming. They were always peeling from being exposed to the elements of hot and humid days in the summer, and the blustery weather of a Virginia winter. However, over the course of the years, they did at times receive facelifts. The paint, more often than not, was not too carefully chosen. It perhaps would be bought at Towler's store at Renan from whatever stock was there, or bought at the Western Auto Store in Brookneal. First they were painted yellow, then red, and then green, which was their final improvement.

You would always find a welcome mat at the old screen door, which was always in need of repair. When screen wire could not be bought, the holes would simply be stuffed with cotton to keep out the insects. The mat was not store-bought — it was woven of scraps left from the sewing machine and then crocheted in whatever form it took to say welcome.

The banister going to the second floor was rather quaint, but the steps always held whatever was either going up or coming down. From shoes to canning jars, there was always an assortment that would sometimes rival a five and dime store.

The old living room held the old grand piano, which some of us would hover under when there was a summer thunderstorm. Somehow, we always felt safer hiding there. We were never allowed to make any noise until the storm passed over — at times we thought the storm would never go by!

The bedroom was centered with the old iron bed, which was always in need of a paint job. It never received one, but who would notice the rust while looking at the handmade quilts, lovingly stitched by Mama on the cold days by the fireside. I can still smell the scent of coal burning in the old stove there, with an occasional flame or two leaping from the damper, looking much like the fire from a dragon's nostrils. The old tea kettle, which always had a prominent place on the lid of the old stove, would serve two purposes, to entertain with an occasional whistle and provide humidity when there was a need.

I guess my favorite room was the kitchen. It was never too hot for the old cook stove to be fired up, as this was our method of being fed. No microwaves, electric mixers, or blenders. Short order cooks and fast foods had a different meaning back then. A short order cook was mama's ability to feed those who happened to drop by at mealtime. Fast food was the time it took to pluck a spring chicken from the back yard, dress it and fry it up, all done within several hours. Freshness meant something back then. I remember the simple crocks of butter, fresh-churned; the ever-so big flour barrel; real bread made in real wooden dough trays; and such. The scents can still awaken my longings for that atmosphere — fried chicken and milk gravy, turnip greens freshly fetched from the immaculate garden that Dad always cultivated, corn pudding bubbling in the old Pyrex dish, and the spicy aroma of peaches and beets pickled for long, winter days ahead.

The back porch was always a sight to behold. The old wringer washer and tubs were on one end, and the other end held the old table that we would surround on summer days for the sharing of a family meal. Grownups could sit in slat-backed chairs, but the younger children would perch on the old bench, which would also hold the wash tubs on Mondays, the designated day to do the family laundry.

Always nearby was the old slop bucket, which never offended anyone. It was a necessity as the hogs and numerous dogs had to be fed. Buckets of chicken feed, lamp oil, and corncobs for lighting of the fires and stacked stove wood would complete the setting. The bleakness of this place of retreat was always brightened by pots of flowers, too fragile to be planted in the yard.

Although there was never much grass to mow, there were flowerbeds everywhere. Petunias, marigolds, touch-me-nots, gladiolas, and other of Mama's favorites grew profusely because of the hands that tended them. If it did not rain enough, they were occasionally bathed in the water from the old wringer washer, bluing and all. And when it did not rain enough for a long time, the wash water was recycled more than once. First the clothes, then a bath if one needed one, and then the flowers. Cleanliness before godliness sometimes was the rule, even if one had to improvise.

What does it take for someone to be happy and content? This country boy felt that it did not take too much back then, for the days spent around this tiny piece of Pittsylvania County were happy ones indeed. Did I hear someone calling "dinner is ready"?

## Queries

My family has lived in Pittsylvania County at least since 1820, when my great-great-grandfather, Jesse McNeely, married Fannie (Francis) Riddle, daughter of Benjamin and Nancy Riddle, at the Banister River Baptist Church.

Jesse and Fannie had two children, Wyatt K. McNeely and Leah G. McNeely. Fannie died with the birth of Leah. Jesse then married Elizabeth Thompson about 1823, also at the Banister River Baptist Church. Both of Jesse's marriages were presided over by Rev. Ira Ellis.

I am looking for information on the history of the Banister River Baptist Church's location and whether it had a cemetery. I believe the church was located on the west side of the Banister River, where it crosses Rt. 703, Irish Road, just past the Pigg home, and that the church may have merged with another church to become Marion Baptist Church, but I'm not positive about this.

Michael McNeely  
2727 Forest Oak Dr.  
Roanoke, VA 24012  
540-977-4818  
gray.april@verizon.net

I am researching the Atkins/Adkins surname: Drury S. Adkins son of Edward Adkins and Mary ?. Drury married Susanna Price in Pittsylvania County, Virginia in 1805.

Martha Sue Crawford  
116 Benjamin St.  
Nashville, TN 37206

I'm interested in information on James Mastin Williams, Jr. and Elsa Motley and their antecedents. I'm descended from them through their daughter Alice who married Spottswood F. Gravely. I'd especially like to know where the Williams family cemetery is.

I'm also interested in information on Rev. Alexander Gordon. I suspect that he may be the father of Katherine, wife of James Walker. Their daughter Wilmoth married James Mastin Williams, Sr.

Anne L. Bettis  
412 Odin Ln. NW Apt. A  
Fort Walton Beach,  
FL 32548-7614  
850-664-2180

## **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,  
<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.

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.