

The Pittsylvania Packet

Winter 2007

Number 63



TIME TO RENEW!

Pittsylvania Historical Society, Chatham, Virginia

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Blue Means Do Not Renew!

If you *have* a light blue mark on your label, you do not need to renew your membership.

If you *do not have* a light blue mark on your label, please renew promptly! The Pittsylvania Historical Society needs your support.

Winter Pittsylvania Historical Society Membership Meeting Monday Evening, January 22nd, 2007 at 7 PM

The Pittsylvania Historical Society, Chatham Books and Shadetree Rare Books will host local author Stephen Ausband on Monday, January 22nd, at Shadetree Rare Books at 7 PM. Shadetree Rare Books is located at 26 South Main Street in Chatham.

Ausband, a professor at Averett University in Danville, has released his latest book for everyone who enjoys being outdoors in Southside Virginia. Entitled *Outdoors Year Round: A Guide to Fishing and Hunting in Coastal Virginia and North Carolina*, the book describes the broad range of outdoor recreation activities offered by coastal Virginia and North Carolina. “Anyone who is interested in outdoor activities — hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife watch-

ing — will enjoy this book,” Ausband said. “I’m not an expert in all of these activities, but I’ve done all of the things described in this book. From flounder fishing in the Chesapeake Bay, to duck hunting in Halifax to watching alligators in the Cape Fear River. We live in a part of the country where there are many inexpensive outdoor activities we can enjoy year round.”

The book is laid out chronologically, one chapter per month. Each chapter features two outdoor adventures suitable for that month. With an easy-reading, literary flair, Ausband describes his experiences and provides custom itineraries for readers who wish to follow in his footsteps. Each chapter includes traveling instructions and pricing information on trips that won’t strain the pocketbook.

Ausband is also the author of *Byrd’s Line: A Natural History* and is always glad to share his Byrd research and how it relates to Pittsylvania County.

Herman Melton’s New Book Released

Herman Melton has released a new book, *Southside Virginia: Echoing Through History*. The book is 126 pages long, with many black-and-white illustrations and photographs and a lovely color cover which

Chatham is Fire Swept

Chatham Savings Bank and adjoining property damaged by blaze on May 29, 1905.

This article is from *The Danville Register*, May 30, 1905 (no author was given). The fire was also reported in *The Washington Post*.

* * * *

Fire Sunday Morning swept the Chatham savings bank building and the building adjoining, damaging property to the amount of \$8,000; partially insured. At about 4 o'clock yesterday morning an alarm was [rung? — microfilm unreadable] and flames were then streaming from the upper windows of the old Johnson store, which adjoins the bank on the north side, and is separated from the court house by a narrow street.

The lower floor of the Johnson store was occupied by R. M. Fox, jeweler, but none of it was saved, the flames having gained such headway when discovered that efforts were fruitless.

The bank building was in flames in a short while, but hard work saved all of the furniture except the safe in the two lower rooms occupied by the bank.

The contents of the two upper rooms, one containing the law library of Congressman Swanson; and the other occupied by Mr. F. J. Wooding as a bedroom, were consumed.

While the fire was at its height, one corner of the courthouse roof caught [on fire] and the building was saved only after an heroic fight. Considerable damage was done to the plastering of the courthouse by water.

The estimated losses are as follows: R. M. Fox, stock of jewelry, \$2,500, with an insurance of \$1,500; George T. Johnson's estate, lower house, \$2,000, no insurance; Chatham Savings Bank, \$2,400, fully insured; Mr. F. J. Wooding, wearing apparel and furniture, \$250, no insurance; Congressman Swanson's law library, \$1,500, insurance, if any, unknown; Southern Bell Telegraph Company, damage to cable, \$150, insurance, now known; courthouse, \$250, insured.

Mr. E. S. Reid, cashier of the burned bank, stated shortly after the fire that the bank would resume business at once in the Hunt building, and that a modern banking house would be erected on the burned site. In Mr. Fox's jewelry store was a large safe, containing a quantity of valuable jewelry, which, if damaged, will increase his losses considerably.

The origin of the fire is unknown, but persons first on the scene say that the fire was on the second story, which contains several rooms, one of which is used as a bedroom.

The citizens turned out in full force and worked faithfully until the flames were entirely under control.

An Important Dinner Party for Claude Swanson

by Charles Minor Blackford, III

[My] Grandfather [who lived in Lynchburg] liked to entertain. He had at least two complete services for twenty-four and extended the dining room almost to the sidewalk to have enough room. My father frequently told me that Claude Swanson's political career started at one of these dinners. As I remember it some congressman died or retired and the question of his successor was being talked over at the table. My grandfather turned to Mr. Swanson and said, "Why don't you run, Claude?" While the latter was protesting modestly a young lady at the table leaned over and said: "Claude, if you run and win I'll marry you!" He ran, and won both the election and the girl.

- from Charles Minor Blackford, III, "Preface," in Susan Leigh Blackford et al., *Letters from Lee's Army*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1947, p. vi.

"Pittsylvania"

by Duval Porter, Cascade, Virginia

This poem was copied during the Great Depression by Mabel Moses from a clipping owned by Mrs. Joseph Whitehead of Chatham. Mabel Moses then submitted it to be included in the Virginia Historical Inventory.

* * * *

Grand old Pittsylvania, deserving every way,
Of pride of all thy children,
 and homage they should pay.
Thy record bright and glorious
 shines out at every stage,
And merits place the foremost upon Virginia's page.
Though other States and countries
 have found a willing pen,
To sing the deeds of daring of their heroic men.
Yet grand old Pittsylvania,
 who second stands to none,
Finds not a single spokesman
 to tell what she has done.

Hence grand old Banner County, inspire me today,
To sing of thy true greatness, deserving every way.
A poet's highest praises and the historic pen,
To chronical the achievements of Pittsylvania Men.

Before the Revolution, aye in Colonial Days,
Her sons were ever ready, for so the record says.
To brave the trackless forest
 when duty bade them go,
To fight the cunning savage
 who sought their overthrow.
And when the Revolution, that stubborn strife began,
The sons of Pittsylvania fought for the right of man.
As bravely as the bravest, on many bloody fields,
Until the haughty Briton at Yorktown humble yields.
Nay, more, she furnished sinews
 for that protracted strife,
By giving to Greene's army its nourishment and life;
For Peytonsburg supplied him
 with food for man and beast,
Else they must have perished, or given up at least.
And yet what is far greater remains as yet unsung,
Surpassing all achievements of days
 when she was young.

To Virginia of the "Sixties" no other county gave,
So many to defend her as Pittsylvania brave.
Ye sons of Pittsylvania! Come listen as I tell,
Of Gettysburg immortal!

Well may your bosom swell.
At the glorious charge of Pickett
upon that bloody day,
Your fathers were the foremost in that terrific fray.
Who are those few brave heroes,
with Armistead at the Wall?
Through shot and shell, they've fought their way,
and with their leader fall.
Tis Carter, White and Tredway,
their names will ever shine.
With Rawley W. Martin's, that dauntless son of thine.

And in the living present thou hast another son,
Bestowing now upon thee, the fame he has won.
Beginning life a plow boy, unaided and unknown,
By virtue of his talent he came into his own.
The name of Claude A. Swanson,
thy most distinguished son,
In halls of State and Congress
with many honors won.
Will shine as one belonging to that illustrious roll,
Whose brilliance the historian will on his page extol.

Be proud, ye sons and daughters of the historic worth,
That crowns your grand old County,
the County of your birth.
Resolve that never, never shall any act of thine,
Dim the brightness of the glories,
that on Pittsylvania shine.

Our Ice House

by James Stone (written circa 1980)
submitted by Barbara Mackin

Our ice house was not a place where ice was made, but rather a place where ice was stored in winter for use during the summer. In that day, the early nineteen hundreds, those living on a farm knew nothing about refrigerators or ice boxes. There was no electricity in our part of Pittsylvania county until much later in the century — around the late nineteen thirties.

While “getting ice” is the term we used back then, I suppose a more informative term would be “harvesting ice,” for that is exactly what we did. Each crop grown on our farm was stored in its own house, and the same held true for ice. For instance, we had tobacco barns and corn houses. Hams were kept in the smoke house. While harvesting the crops we planted required much more time over a long period, getting ice usually required one day, and for me was a very special day.

Maybe something should be said about the ice house. First, it covered a big hole in the ground, about 15 feet across at the top and about the same depth. The earthen walls came together, or very nearly so, at the bottom. They were nothing but clay, although

some of the houses of that time had poles around the walls to keep the clay from crumbling to the bottom of the pit.

Some type of drainage was desirable at the bottom, usually a blind ditch, especially if the ice house was located on a hillside where the ditch could be dug from the bottom to the surface not too far from the house. The ditch would then be lined with pine poles or suitable stones arranged so that water from the melting ice in the hole would drain along the ditch to the outside.

Our ice house did not have covered walls because the clay was of the type that did not crumble. The hole [the ice house pit] was covered with a suitable roof, built in the form of the letter “A” with its feet on the ground. Of course, “getting ice” is a lost skill that was once an important part of winter farm routine. Extremely cold weather was required, and usually a few days of cloudy weather. No snow or sleet — for these elements left a slush on top of the ice that rendered it unsuitable for keeping. That is, it would likely melt before the time it was needed. The kind of weather needed would freeze the pond ice at least two and a half inches thick, and the thicker the better. The minimum was two and a half inches because it had to support the weight of the man who did the cutting. There were times when we would use

a board laid flat on the ice for the man to stand on while cutting with an ax. This man would cut off a piece, depending on its thickness, about the size of an ordinary living room. With a little prodding, this piece could be steered towards the men on shore with long poles on which a hook was fastened. It usually took about four men — two with hooks underneath the ice, and two with their hooks on top, to pull a piece out of the water and start it skidding over poles to its loading destination. Once the men had ice lying on the ground, it was a simple matter to get subsequent cakes of ice out and skid them over the first pieces of ice.

Hauling the ice home was the next step. The pond we used was on the land of a neighbor about a mile away. We would use two two-horse teams to do the hauling, one driver for each. One man was needed in the ice house to break up and place the ice so there were no empty spaces. He had to do his “arranging” after one wagon was unloaded and before the next load arrived. In all, about seven people were needed: four men at the pond, two drivers, and one at the ice house. Everybody snatched their lunch between loads and unloads. Even the horses were given a short feed while the ice was being unloaded, but they were not unhitched from the wagon.

There were winters that ice did not get thick enough to harvest. I recall two or three such winters. We would then harvest snow, rolling up huge balls as large as two grown men could move. These balls would then be rolled onto a slide pulled by one or two horses, and then rolled into the ice house. From our large yard, we could get enough snow to fill the house, but it would not last like ice. But as my father would say, “It beats no ice.”

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.

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