NEWS - NOTES

The Newsletter of the Rockbridge Historical Society

The past educating the present.

Volume XXXVII Issue 5 November 2010

Headquarters and Exhibition Space at Campbell House, Washington & Randolph Streets, Lexington, Virginia

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November Program to Explore Lee's Three Most Momentous Decisions

Credit:RHS Collection

Lee visiting Stonewall Jackson's grave. (A. J. Volck, 1872)

On Monday, November 29th, at 7:30 pm, the Rockbridge Historical Society will present its final public history program of the year in the Parish Hall of the R. E. Lee Memorial (Episcopal) Church, featuring insights into the spiritual life of General Robert E. Lee. As always, the event is free and open to the public.

Lee remains a nearly mythic figure in American history, standing like a colossus athwart the nineteenth century much the same as George Washington did the eighteenth century, and General George Marshall the twentieth. And there are other similarities among these three icons of duty, honor, and selfless service to the civic good. All were essentially very private persons, never indulging in easy intimacy outside their respective families.

None of them was self-promoting, and none left an autobiography, despite their

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About the Speaker

The featured speaker for our November Program, The Reverend (Dr.) R. David Cox, has such an extensive record of personal achievements as a writer, speaker, author, minister, and public figure, that it's almost impossible to tally them all up, much less set them out in the space allotted. A brief summary will give the reader a sense of the man.

Fr. R. David Cox

David Cox is married to Melissa Anne McCoy, whose long-time service as an administrator in the Journalism Department at Washington & Lee University is legendary. They have three accomplished children, Andrew, Trevor, and Meredith.

Our speaker was awarded the BA degree in history, cum laude, at the University of Virginia, and went on to advanced study at nearly a dozen institutions of higher learning, including Yale Divinity School, where he earned a Masters Degree in Divinity, and the Graduate Theological Foundation (in association with Oxford University) where he received the PhD in Theology. He has completed other advanced studies at Harvard Divinity School, Virginia Theological Seminary, and numerous other educational institutions of similar note.

A substantial portion of his working life was devoted to service as Rector at St. David's Episcopal Church in Connecticut and R. E. Lee Memorial (Episcopal) Church, here in Lexington. While here he held the position of Episcopal Chaplain at both VMI and Washington & Lee for many years. More recently, he has served as interim rector at several other Episcopal Churches. Always involved in civic affairs, David has served on the Lexington City Council since 2009.

In addition to his newspaper columns and scholarly publications, Rev. Cox has long been at work on a book-length study of General Robert E. Lee's personal spiritual life, and how Lee's faith influenced the course of his life, tentatively entitled Lee's Faith. It is from this endeavor that the material for this month's program has been taken.

Meeting at a Glance

Date: Monday, November 29th

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Where: Parish Hall, R. E. Lee Memorial (Episcopal) Church

123 West Washington Street (North Side)

Program: "Three Decisions of Lee"

Speaker: Theologian and author, The Rev. (Dr.) R. David Cox

{A brief RHS annual business meeting and election of officers will precede the lecture.}

November Program

Continued from page 1

vast contributions to the canon of American character and accomplishment. Thus, despite the very public nature of their respective lives, it has not always been easy to plumb the depths of their natures so as to create an accurate portrait of the individual.

The Rev (Dr.) R. David Cox will set out to remedy this situation with regard to one of these giants of American lore and legend by exploring with the audience what he believes to have been General Lee's three most momentous personal decisions, and their effect upon his life and legacy. His analysis will focus upon General Lee's decision to be confirmed in the Episcopal Church, his agonizing and principled decision not to take up arms against his native Virginia, and his firm commitment, as a matter of faith, to be a post-war man of peace.

Attendees will come away from this program with a greater understanding of General Lee's place in our history, as well as a clearer picture of the man.

In Memoriam

Mary Frances Nicely Cummings (1915-2010)

The Rockbridge Historical Society lost one of its most supportive friends, loyal supporters, and tireless volunteers when Mary Frances Nicely Cummings passed away peacefully five days before her 95th birthday on September 5th.

She was the daughter of the late Major Edward Nicely and Bessie Whitmore Nicely. After her mother's death in the Great Flu Pandemic of 1918 - 1919, her father married Ruby Woody Nicely. Following her graduation from the old Lexington High School she worked as a secretary for the school and for Washington & Lee University.

In 1939 Mary Frances married Russell Madison Cummings, Sr. During their married life, they raised three sons, shared the ownership of the Lexington Shoe Hospital, enjoyed raising a large garden, and co-directed the Northington Nature Camp. Russell Cummings died in 1967.

During her long and productive life, Mary Frances was involved in a wide assortment of volunteer work and community service. She served as the Executive Secretary of the Rockbridge Tuberculosis Association and for 20 years was Director of Christian Education at the Lexington Presbyterian Church. She was also a member of the Planning Commission, the League of Women Voters, Lioness Club, and Lexington Women's Club. Several years ago, she was named Lexington Citizen of the Year, an honor she cherished, and richly deserved.

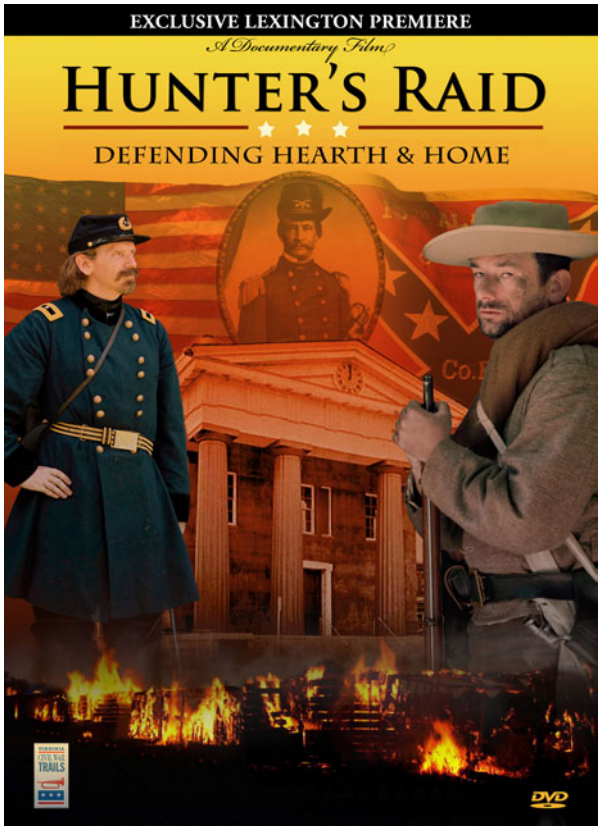
One of her most appreciated contributions was her support of the Rockbridge Historical Society as a long-time member. For many years Mary Frances rarely missed any RHS history program or special event, and invariably volunteered to help with every RHS project.

Universally considered an invaluable resource on the history of Lexington and Rockbridge County, she kept voluminous files, clippings, and old photographs, which she freely shared with family, friends, and generations of interested parties. Much of this material is being acquisitioned by the Society for its collection.

Historic Documentary Film Rousing Success

Premier of Civil War Documentary Held in VMI's Marshall Hall

The Society's remarkable array of historical events and programs just never seems to end. Each year appears to be better than the last. As our 75th anniversary approaches in a couple of years, we hope to continue to meet the very high standard we've set for ourselves for many years to come.



A wonderful, recent example of these activities is the exclusive Lexington Premiere of a new Civil War documentary, Hunter's Raid: Defending Hearth & Home, which was presented at the Gillis Theater on October 25th, in VMI's Marshall Center for Leadership and Ethics. Showing of the movie was a collaborative effort by Rockbridge Historical Society, VMI Museums, and Historic Sandusky Foundation, which produced the film.

The approximately one-hour showing was attended by nearly 200 people, and was followed by a reception with light refreshments, during which attendees had the opportunity to meet many of the actors in costume.

Hunter's Raid is a full-color, wide screen, surround-sound depiction of the most traumatic event to befall the Valley of Virginia in the three centuries since its discovery by Europeans. The American Civil War (1861-1865) so severely rent the fabric of our new nation that even today our social, cultural, and political institutions have never fully recovered. Its effects still shape our national identity and steer the course of American policy – both at home and abroad.

The federal rampage in the spring and summer of 1864 was the culmination of three years of thwarted Union attempts to drive the conflict home to western Virginia. It was also an early manifestation of total war against Southern civilian populations and private property, later made notorious on a far vaster scale by Union General W. T. Sherman. Many families along Hunter's route of march were made homeless and destitute as a result of this strategy. And evidence of the Yankee path of destruction through the Valley of Virginia remains today.

A DVD of the movie is available from the RHS shop for $16.95, plus tax (in Virginia), and $5.00 for shipping. Please see the RHS website at www.rockhist.org for details.

Membership

The Importance of Dues

Members' dues have always been a significant source of financial support for your Society's missions and stewardship responsibilities. Memberships are on a calendar-year basis. **Please check your mailing label to insure your 2010 membership dues have been paid.**

Annual Dues
Family – $30 • Individual – $20
Student – $10 • Corporate/Business – $50

Special Opportunities for Higher Levels of Support
• Benefactor – $500 • Patron – $250 • Sponsor – $100

The Society is a 501 (c) (3) charitable corporation. Dues above the basic level, as well as contributions in cash or kind, are deductible to the extent provided by state and/or federal law, and the tax regulations of each jurisdiction. For particulars, consult your tax advisor.

Put Your Name in History

Rockbridge Historical Society is ready to publish Dr. Charles Bodie's new county history, Remarkable Rockbridge. A ground-breaking new study that brings the story of our area up to the 21st century, the book will be a must for everyone interested in local history.

Now you can have a part in it! Names of contributors will be listed on an acknowledgment page: Benefactors – $500 or more; Patrons – $250 or more; Sponsors – $100 or more; and Friends – $50 or more. The Society is undertaking this publication itself; so, we have to raise the money for the printing bill. With your help, we can do it. Already we have a number of significant gifts. With your contribution, we should be able to bring the book out this spring. So write yourself into history with a gift to the RHS!

Development

The ever-increasing cost of maintaining our three historic houses and grounds, plus the multitude of other activities we undertake, or sponsor, require financial support considerably beyond the income generated by membership dues and rental property revenues.

In addition to enhanced memberships and donations, RHS friends and supporters have arranged employers' matching gifts. Moreover, philanthropic individuals and private foundations are also contributing.

If you haven't had the opportunity to do so, please consider a gift and/or include RHS in your estate planning.

For additional information and opportunities to support RHS, please visit our website at www.rockhist.org, or contact us at 540/464-1058 or by e-mail to rochist@hotmail.com.

Event Calendar

Monday ● November 29th ● 7:30 pm

Program: Three Decisions of Lee

Speaker: The Rev. (Dr.) R. David Cox

Location: Parish Hall, R.E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church

A brief RHS annual business meeting and election of officers will precede the lecture.

Saturday ● December 11th ● 11:00 am – 3:00 pm

Program: Victorian Christmas Open House

Location: Campbell House

Scheduled events are subject to change. For confirmation check the RHS Website: www.rockhist.org or call 540/464-1058.

David Coffey, our indefatigable Program Chair, assisted by helpful suggestions from the RHS Board, is busy arranging a 2011 season of programs and events sure to please everyone fortunate enough to attend them. Program planning currently underway includes presentations on famed missionary, William Morrison, historic local letters to the editor, and the history of the Virginia Military Institute as told in photographs.

Your Society is always interested in producing programs and events that are both enjoyable and instructive. Everyone is welcome to submit ideas at rochist@hotmail.com, or by calling 540/464-1058.

Santa Claus is coming to Campbell House Again This Year!

He will be at the Society's Annual Victorian Christmas Open House on Saturday, December 11, Noon – 1 p.m.

President's Perspective

By Charles A. Bodie, Ph.D. – President and Board Chair

Over the past few weeks, we have watched leaves floating to the ground, blowing about and gathering on the fences and shrubs. Their movements and tannic aroma trigger memories of my childhood. My dad would hand me the rake, and soon I was jumping in my big piles. After tiring of that, we burned the leaves. Watching the lifting curls of smoke, we sensed that winter was not far off.

Changing seasons are part of our emotional calendar. This time of year usually brings more subdued spirits. Behind us is the season of growth, and now plants move into a dormant state. They are getting ready for a season of cold, a time of rest before another season of growth returns.

Falling leaves also signify the end of another year, compelling us to reflect on what we have done over the past twelve months and what we can do better. In my family, we think about some of our goals for the new year. It is part of the rhythm of life.

Organizations must do the same, especially in today's economic climate. Smart ones, like boats on the water, try to calculate the probable winds and set realistic destinations. This year, your Society began with budget cuts, followed its spending carefully, and earnestly engaged in fund raising. By and large, we have been pleased by the path of events, including your support.

Now, another calendar year is ahead of us, and we are reassessing our course. After a board retreat in September, we are now adopting a strategic plan for 2011 that sets forth our activities. It involves discussions of costs and benefits, and upon completion, the board will approve a budget in light of the plan. Since September, a development committee has also been busy. I hope that all members will respond generously to our contacts. Your help will make the crucial difference towards our success in 2011.

The new year will impose several major obligations upon the Society. For one, our stewardship of three historic buildings requires large, ongoing expenditures. We have counted on our rental income to help cover those expenses. When major restoration costs arise, as they sometimes do, we depend on the generosity of donors. In the year ahead, the stairs and second-floor deck on the Castle will require replacement.

Another looming obligation is the publication of our new county history, Remarkable Rockbridge, now in its final stages. Following final editing, including laying out over 100 illustrations, the completed manuscript will be professionally printed and bound. This will be a very big event for the Society, for the community, and not least for the author. But it cannot happen unless we raise $20,000.

This is an exciting time for the Society, a time to reflect both on our achievements and our challenges ahead. For an organization dating back to 1939, the RHS has sought to preserve and tell the stories of our communities, not only in Lexington, but in Buena Vista, Rockbridge Baths, Collierstown, Glasgow, and elsewhere. Your financial contributions and volunteer help are vital to our mission. I will have more to say about the latter in another column. Again, thank you for your past support; enjoy the leaves and colors of autumn. They will pass all too quickly.

THE ROCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
EST. 1939

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Summer: Open Wed.-Sat. (10-4), Sun. (1-4)

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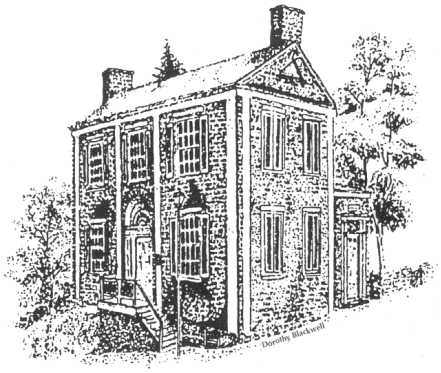

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Director's Corner

By George Wm. Warren, IV, Executive Director

Dear reader, autumn always seems to compel folks to look back. And, while we're at it, why not do a little looking into the future as well? That's the subject of this installment of my own personal communication with our membership, friends, and supporters.

Please take a moment to just look around you. Isn't this a lovely place to live? That's why you're here. You, or some ancestor – whether remote or recent – were captivated by the charm and beauty of our little place in the Valley. As those familiar with the Society know, a significant reason our community is so agreeable is nearly three quarters of a century of dedicated labor by a little band of concerned citizens that began with the foundation of the Rockbridge Historical Society in 1939.

We're sure most everyone knows about our museum, three historic houses, garden and grounds, reference library, history publications, artifact collection, special events, newsletter, and public history programs.

But I bet virtually no one has any idea that our wonderful history education and historic preservation accomplishments have not been supported by any endowment, ongoing foundation support, or financial contributions from government at any level. Until the very recent past, the Society hasn't even had an annual development program.

Basically, we've been frugal; we've created a modest income stream from tenants in our historic buildings, and we've had a lot of volunteer support. The reality, however, is that we can no longer operate at this level of excellence in the twenty-first century. We're doing many things very well now. But we need solid and regular financial support to keep up our good work. So, please bear this in mind when you receive our year's end donation and membership request, which should soon arrive in your mailbox.