The Historic Barns of Shenandoah County Project Gets Organized

Fall 2018 Program Update by John Adamson

The Historic Barns of Shenandoah County Program sponsored by SCHS features a survey of our barns as a key and early feature of the program. Aware that barns are threatened by obsolescence and high maintenance costs, we are anxious to survey as many barns as possible before they are lost. We define "historic barns" as barns constructed either of logs or timber framing. Log barns seem to have been built from the earliest settlement days (1730s) until about the middle of the 19th century. Timber frame barns date from about 1800 to the 1950s.

As of this writing, I have surveyed 88 barns in a little more than one year. Each barn is photographed (exterior and interior, both levels if it is a bank barn), measured for length and width, and categorized by construction materials and architectural form. Unusual details are recorded by photography and by written notes.

The raw statistics of the 88 Shenandoah County Historic Barns surveyed so far are as follows:
- Basic Form: Bank Barns = 75, Ground Barns = 13
- Construction Method: Notched Log = 12, Timber Framing = 76
- Average Length = 57.3 feet
- Average Width = 35 feet
- Average Date of Construction = 1881 (exact date is usually unknown, but can be estimated)

Condition: Varies widely, most barns need some maintenance, a few barns badly deteriorated

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November Program:
Shenandoah County: A Legacy of Iron

Much has been written about the Civil War history of the Shenandoah Valley but little is known of the major contribution that smelting iron has had on the valley’s legacy. The Civil War lasted four years but the iron era lasted over one hundred and fifty years. During the course of that time, over twenty-five iron smelting furnaces operated in the valley; eight of those in Shenandoah County alone.

How these furnaces operated and their contribution to Shenandoah County will be presented in a talk to the Shenandoah County Historical Society by Norman H. Scott at St. Paul’s Heritage Center, at 106 S. High Street in Edinburg, on November 13th at 7:00 pm. His talk will be based on his recently published book, Shenandoah Iron.

How pig iron got its name, the role of industrial slavery, the importance of the Shenandoah River and the railroads in transporting iron and the difference between cold-blast and hot-blast furnaces will be topics of discussion.

Special emphasis will be placed on the Liberty Furnace and how it became a complex enterprise, unique among all other furnace operations in Virginia. What made the Liberty Furnace different and why the “Dinky” railroad was so important to the success of the Liberty enterprise will be illuminated.

The presentation will be accompanied by diagrams depicting how iron is smelted and old photographs revealing how the furnaces actually appeared when in operation.

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As I write, I’m hoping that this wet weather pattern we seem to be caught in is going to shift and bring us somewhat drier air. The mosquitoes this year are enormous, and, at my house, doors have become hard to open and close due to the humidity!

Our September program meeting was outstanding. Writer, researcher and historian Deirdre Sinnott shared with us the results of extensive work she has done bringing to light the compelling story of Harry Bird and George. In 1836, the two enslaved men ran away from Woodstock with the encouragement of their owner, Mary Hoffman Geyer, and eventually made it to freedom in Canada. We very much appreciate that Deirdre, who is from New York, has spent many hours and traveled many miles to explore and record this story of Shenandoah County history.

I’m glad to report that a homeless quilt has now found a home. A couple of years ago SCHS member, Mary Ruth Parsons, gave us a lovely quilt that she bought in the mid-2000s at an auction in Maurytown. The quilt had belonged to Wilmer “Buck” Headley and is inscribed to him from his Aunt Ella. Mary Ruth hoped to find a Headley family member who would want the quilt, but had no luck. She also wondered who Aunt Ella was; both she and I searched records but found no definitive information. Mary Ruth gave the quilt to SCHS in the hope that we’d eventually find an interested family member, or even sell it to be nefit the Society. Thank goodness we didn’t sell it! Mary Ruth recently located a nephew of Buck’s, living right here in Shenandoah County, who is happy to have this family heirloom. I want to offer congratulations to the Hottel-Keller Memorial, Inc. Shenandoah Germanic Heritage Museum for their recent creation of a conservation easement on 392 acres of the core portion of original lands obtained by George Hottel and George Keller in 1737. These lands include all of the Hottel-Keller property west of Back Rd. The easement is from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and protects important agricultural, natural and historical features of the farm.

Of significant influence in the VOF’s decision to help create the easement is the designation’s protection of core areas and study areas of the western part of the Battle of Toms Brook. HKMI receives $400,000 in cash from two overlying VOF grants with additional financial benefits from tax credits. The easement allows for a section of the property to be used to build a museum and for renovations to recreate a historic 1820s era farm. Again, congratulations!

Morrison Alert - there’s a new photo album in the Shenandoah Room at the County library in Edinburg. Hope you’re able to take a look.
Library Celebrates National Archives Month

October is National Archives Month. The Shenandoah County Library will celebrate with several programs including:

What is an Archive and what does it do for Me? Protecting the Past: The Truban Archives and Our Community will explore the role of the Truban Archives, in preserving our history and how we work with the community to meet that goal, in a program at 6:30 PM Tuesday, October 16th at the County Library in Edinburg.

Identifindme Photograph Viewing Party from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM on Saturday, October 27th will give community members the opportunity to view many of the Truban Archives and provide possible identification. Several hundred photographs will be on display in physical and digital format while volunteers and staff will be on hand to collect identifications. Ice cream and other refreshments will be served.

Free Genealogy E-books from Family Tree Magazine

Family Tree Magazine is happy to provide you with the resources and knowledge you need to dive into your family history.

Download free genealogy e-books to explore a specific subject and get your genealogy research started. Best of all: these genealogy resources don’t require a purchase.

Some titles include:
- Surnames: Family Search Tips and Surname Origins
- 48 Ancestry.com Search Tips
- Jump into Genetic Genealogy: Use Genealogical DNA Testing to Solve Family Mysteries
- 38 FamilySearch Search Tips: Find Free Genealogy Records Online
- Family Tree Tips: 23 Secrets to Organize Your Genealogy
- 30 Family History Writing Prompts https://www.familytreemagazine.com/free-genealogy-ebooks/

Editor’s Note: An email address is required for the free download. The website says: “By providing your email address you will begin to receive our newsletters, special offers and more free content from Family Tree.”

[Reprinted with permission from Michigan Genealogical Society Summer newsletter.]

Morrison Photo Collection to be featured exhibit at Visitor Center

Hugh Morrison Jr. photographed the people and places of Shenandoah County, Virginia, during the first half of the 1900s. The era counted two World Wars and the Great Depression among its defining moments. When Morrison’s career began in 1898, few people had electricity, cars, or telephones. When it ended in 1950, few people lacked them. Hugh Morrison photographed through it all and compiled an immense body of work. The SCHS volunteers have processed over 31,000 glass plates and film negatives spanning Morrison’s long career. Copies of each photo are in the Shenandoah County Library and available for visitors to examine and hopefully identify the photos. Over 5,000 have been identified so far. This new exhibit at the Visitor Center at the Historic County Courthouse, at 103 N. Main St. in Woodstock, will include an overview of the collection and its vast array of subject matter. The Center is open year round, every Thursday, Friday & Saturday from 11 AM to 4 PM.

Program Meeting

Tuesday, Nov.13th  7:00 PM
St. Paul’s Heritage Center
106 S. High St., Edinburg, VA

Program:
Shenandoah County:
A Legacy of Iron
By Norman H. Scott

Robert E. Lee Symposium: The Shenandoah Campaigns and Harpers Ferry will take place this year, at historic Harper’s Ferry, on Nov. 2nd - 4th. During the symposium you will enjoy lectures by renowned historians, exclusive tours of Harpers Ferry and surrounding battlefields, and the opportunity to socialize with other history lovers!

Harpers Ferry, located on the border between North and South, changed hands eight times during the Civil War and witnessed five battles. Abolitionist John Brown launched his ill-fated war to end slavery here, stopped by Robert E. Lee and U.S. Marines. Stonewall Jackson earned his greatest victory of the war at Harpers Ferry during Lee’s first invasion of the North. The historic town has been restored to its Civil War era and its battlefields are well-preserved reminders of Harpers Ferry’s strategic importance during America’s bloodiest war.

The schedule will include:

Friday Nov. 2 • 5:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Cocktails, Dinner, and Lecture by Dr. Jonathan A. Noyalas

Saturday Nov. 3 • 7:30 am - 9:00 pm
Breakfast, Tour of the town of Harpers Ferry, Lunch, Tour of the Battlefields, Dinner, and Lecture by Denis Frye

Sunday Nov. 4 • 7:30 am - 12:00 pm
Breakfast, Concluding Remarks, and Q & A with lecturers

Last day to register for the entire symposium and all symposium options will be Oct.19, 2018. Contact Jon Bachman at 804-493-1972 or jbachman@stratfordhall.org for questions and to register. Daily Fees are available which includes meals or one can purchase the entire weekend. Overnight accommodations are not included in the daily fees.
Continuing Series on Historic Buildings in Shenandoah County

Baker’s Store on Back Road in Mount Olive, VA

By: John Adamson

Before we had social media to keep up with friends and neighbors, before everyone had a car to go shopping, there was the general store. Baker’s Store in Mount Olive, built in 1860, served as the community center for more than 150 years.

Though it sold everything from groceries to clothing to hardware, it was much more than a store. Ephraim Baker who operated the store in the years after the Civil War made the business of the store a cornerstone of post-war recovery. He took farm products in trade from local producers, selling these products to distant markets such as Harrisonburg and Washington D.C. This provided local farmers with wide access to markets and helped them recover from the economic devastation of the war. The store was also the Post Office, providing a communications link beyond Mount Olive. Just as important was the store’s role as a community social center. A pot-bellied stove served as a gathering point for locals to meet, greet and share local news.

In the early 20th century, William (“Bill”) Baker continued these vital community traditions. Bill Baker’s specialty was receiving and shipping locally produced eggs. 1930s ledger books still at the store show hundreds of cases of eggs being sold to customers as far away as Brooklyn, New York. A case of eggs was 18 dozen, and the large volume of eggs being sold shows how Bill Baker provided an expansive market for his neighbors.

Baker’s Store continued to serve the Mount Olive community in much the same way well into the 21st century. The store was a game-checking station for many years and even provided overnight accommodation for hunters in the hunters lodge building behind the store. Local music was featured with informal bluegrass concerts on Saturday nights in the store.

But inevitably, changes in shopping and communication patterns made the store uneconomical to operate and early in the 21st century, the store closed. Reopened a couple of times in recent years with limited success, Baker’s Store closed for what seemed like the final time in 2015.

In 2017, recently retired Marcella De Ville decided to take a long vacation driving from her home in Houston, Texas to Maine. On her way, she made a wrong turn in Toms Brook and found herself at Baker’s Store. Marcella was strangely fascinated — that fascination turning into an idea and then commitment and decisive action. In February, 2018 Marcella re-opened Baker’s Store. She never did get to Maine.

The store building itself is unspectacular, but is a solid example of mid-19th century retail architecture. It is a two story timber frame structure on a limestone foundation and displays modest decorative detail. A long extension to the rear, part of the original construction, provides for a generous 60 by 23 foot store space. The loft above shows the hand hewn timbers of its 1860 construction. Worn wood surfaces and floors speak to generations of customers and community activity. The hunter’s lodge out back is still there, now used by a local tenant.

Serving the local community again, as it did for over 150 years, Baker’s Store is open six days a week. Marcella makes breakfast for a regular clientele – 7 a.m. Tuesday thru Friday, 8 a.m. Saturdays and 10 a.m. Sundays. Her specialty is, of course, locally produced eggs. Go by and let Marcella share her story with you, you just might meet someone you know having breakfast.

For more information, you may reach Marcella De Ville at 832-949-5351 or by email at: devillemarcella6@gmail.com.

One change due to modern practice is that you won’t find a listing for the store in the local phone book.
Barn Project Update -

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A two crib log barn in Fort Valley. Estimated construction date about 1780

Because log barns are often 200 years old or more, it is no surprise that the majority of our historic barns are of the later timber frame construction type. What is surprising is how many log barns are still standing. It will be interesting to see how many more are found as the survey continues.

A few weeks ago, I led an open meeting to see if there was any community interest in forming a working group to help with the SCHS Barn Program. About 40 people came to the meeting and 24 expressed interest in volunteering to help with the program. A second meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 2 at 7 p.m. at the Historic Courthouse, 103 E. Main Street in Woodstock. This meeting is open to all and is not too late to participate in saving the Historic Barns of Shenandoah County. Please contact me for more information.

John Adamson:
adamsons@shentel.net or call me at 540 975-2240.

Quotable Quote

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.
- Maya Angelou

Remedies & Curious Cures

By John Heatwole

[Excerpt from his book Shenandoah Voices]

It is difficult at times to distinguish folk remedies from superstitions. Some of the approaches used to cure illnesses in the 19th and early 20th centuries seem absurd to us today, although when they are studied, many prove to have beneficial properties. On the other hand, some methods are found to be detrimental to good health and must be discarded. Some time-honored knowledge has been lost because the country practitioners who used these folk cures were ridiculed by the developing medical profession as being backward and quaint.

With most cures, it helped if the patients believed in the healing power of the herbs, stones, manipulations and incantations or combinations of any of them. Remedies that relied heavily on ritual were probably most successful when taken with an enormous dose of faith.

Few of the more interesting ones:

✚ If you wrap a stocking around a sore throat, it will soon be cured.
✚ If you have chapped lips, you can get relief by kissing the middle rail in a five-rail fence.
✚ Snake root tea is good for high blood pressure.
✚ Horse chestnuts carried in a pocket are thought to ward off rheumatism.
✚ A tea or broth made from the hind legs of mice is used for kidney ailments.
✚ For someone who is weak and recovering from a prolonged illness, make them a broth from sparrows. They’ll get their strength back quickly.
✚ A tea made from peppermint leaves will stop a stomach ache.
✚ When mumps invaded the home, it was traditional to put hog manure on the throat as a relief or cure.
✚ When on the march, Valley soldiers of German ancestry stopped at farms where they knew German people lived. They’d fill up mess kits with sauerkraut, thus helping themselves to avoid colds and the like illnesses that invaded the camps.
✚ For a bad cold or pleurisy, put lard on your chest with salt sprinkled on it at night.
✚ Drinking tea made from the aromatic sage is said to keep a woman’s hair from turning grey prematurely.
✚ Goldenseal and Comfort Root teas will help an upset stomach.
✚ “One the family was down with measles, I put sheep manure in boiling water, strained it, and add two ounces of moonshine. It was-”
✚ A buzzard’s feather stuck in a hat will help relieve rheumatism.
✚ Catnip tea was made for children with the colic.
✚ “Most people in our area would rub turpentine on a sprain. You never covered it or it would burn.”
✚ “Greasy Mustard” plaster was used on the sufferer’s chest for a deep cold. Many informants spoke of being burned by mustard plasters, but this one was made with lard and spread on a cloth that could be placed on the patient without burning. Another non-burning plaster was made with mustard, lard and egg whites.
✚ During the Civil War, some Valley soldiers chewed dried slippery bark when in battle or on the march. It was said to relieve thirst and hunger.

[Reprinted with permission]
Upcoming Events

**Saturday, Oct. 20th at 10 AM**
**Train Day at the Strasburg Museum** will be hosted by the Massanutten Tractor Club. The famous train exhibit in the baggage car beside the museum will be open and there will also be barrel rides. Free.

**Thursday, Oct. 25th at 7:00 PM**
**Broken Bones and Rotten Teeth in 18th Century America** is the subject of an evening event at the Burwell-Morgan Mill, in Millwood VA, sponsored by the Clarke County Historical Association. In time for Halloween, historian Donald Post brings his collection of 18th-century surgical tools to discuss the often gory details of surgery in Colonial America. You’ll learn how the colonial doctors treated battle wounds, bad teeth, amputations, illnesses and more. Tickets are $10 for CCHA members & $15 for non-members. Info: 540-955-2600

**Saturday, Oct. 27th - 6:00 PM**
Ghost Tours will start at the Strasburg Library on W. King St. with tours every 15 minutes. Pre-sale Tix at $3 on sale at Town Office, 465-9197; Day of tix at $5 at Town Library. Special needs tour available at 3:00 PM; reserve by calling 540-325-4397. A fun family event sponsored by Strasburg Heritage Association. For more info: www.strasburgvaheritage.org

**Saturday, Oct. 27th & 28th 10 to 4**
**Christmas in October at the Fort Valley Museum** Info: 540-933-6690

**Saturday, Nov. 3rd - 11 AM to 4 PM**
**Clarke County Historical Association’s 8th Annual Heritage Day** at the Burwell-Morgan Mill in Millwood, VA. Ever wanted to experience every day life in the 1700s? There will offer be demonstrations on how people in the colonial era did fundamental activities such as food production (milling wheat and corn), woodworking, hands-on sewing demonstrations, and cooking. There will also be kids’ games, fresh apple and pear cider, and an encampment of Revolutionary War re-enactors from the Second Virginia Regiment. All activities will be inside or right outside the Mill and if it’s a nice day, we’ll spread out to lovely meadow. FREE. For info: 540-955-2600

**Thursday, Nov. 15th - 7:00 PM**
**Tracing your Civil War ancestors** will be discussed by Nicholas Picerno, Chairman of the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation at the New Market Historical Society’s November program meeting. Mr. Picerno will speak on tracing Civil War ancestors. He will demonstrate on-line resources for conducting genealogies and explain how archives and historical societies can assist with ancestor research. Those who had a Confederate ancestor in the Civil War, are invited to bring their name and regiment for assistance. Program is at the New Market Town Council Chambers at 9418 John Sevier Road. Public is invited. For info: nmhs@newmarkethistoricalsociety.org

**Sunday, Dec. 16th - 2:00 - 4:00 PM**
**Shenandoah County Historic Barns** will be presented by John Adamson, who will discuss a new project, by the Shenandoah County Historical Society, who will be surveying and cataloging the many barns in the County. The program, sponsored by the Strasburg Heritage Association, will be at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church on Washington St. in Strasburg. Public is invited.

**MORE EVENTS ON WEB SITE**
A new shorter web site address: www.SCHS1795.com