The Historian

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia

Spring | May 2025 | Volume 30, Issue 2

Dear NCHSC Members and Friends,

As I write this President's letter, I find myself thinking about spring. It's been a cold winter, and at my home, our gas fireplace has been a welcome comfort—those small flames make the living room feel cozy and warm. Of course, the gas bill that arrives each month reminds us that comfort sometimes comes at a cost! Thankfully, spring is here, and with it, warmer temperatures and longer days.

On February 16, 2025, NCHSC partnered with the Chesapeake Central Library for a joint program celebrating African American History Month. Our guest speaker, Jessica Cosmos—Historical Services Manager for the Chesapeake Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department—gave an insightful presentation on the historic Cornland School. This one-room African American schoolhouse was relocated in 2021 to a new site at Route 17 and Glencoe Street. We're grateful to Ms. Vivian Washington, Manager of the Central Library, for introducing us to Jessica and helping make the event a success. It was well-attended, and we were delighted to meet so many new faces from our community. I encourage everyone to visit the Cornland School—it's a powerful reminder of how education was delivered in early Norfolk County, Virginia.

Just a few weeks ago, I asked our Library Director, Mrs. Amanda Jackson, about the microfilm machine that had been in the computer lab. Unfortunately, it had broken and had been moved to storage. I asked if it might be possible for us to use it in our Wallace History Room. Amanda kindly said, "Robert, you can have it—but it doesn't work." Thankfully, Kay Ziegler, Manager of the Wallace Room, took a

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Calendar of Events

May 2025
Closed 11 May

NCHSC Board Meeting via ZOOM
13 May 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
18 May 2:00pm

Closed 25 & 26 May

June 2025
Closed 19 Jun

July 2025
Closed 4 Jul

August 2025
Closed 31 Aug

September 2025
Closed 1 Sep

NCHSC Board Meeting via ZOOM
9 Sep 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
21 Sep 2:00pm



President's Message, *Continued*

look and quickly diagnosed the issue. Within a week, she had it up and running again! Now historians and genealogists can access our rich collection of old newspapers—*The American Beacon*, *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, *Virginia Pilot*, *Ledger Dispatch*, and more—on microfilm once again. Many thanks to Amanda Jackson for this wonderful addition to the Wallace History Room.

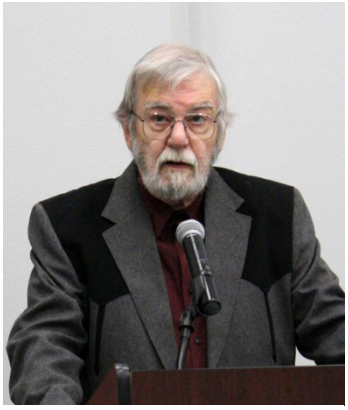
Our Membership Luncheon on April 5th at the Garrett Plantation was a great success! We welcomed both longtime friends and new members, enjoyed a delicious meal, and were treated to a captivating talk by Norfolk historian Steve Forrest on "The Battle of Craney Island." The Garrett home provided a beautiful and fitting backdrop for the event.

As always, thank you for your continued support. I look forward to seeing you at upcoming events!

Warmest regards,
Robert B. Hitchings
President, Norfolk County Historical Society

Larry Floyd to Present "The Hillsville Courthouse Tragedy" at May Membership Meeting

Please join us at the Chesapeake Central Library on May 18th at 2:00 pm to welcome Mr. Larry Floyd as our guest speaker. Mr. Floyd will present "The Hillsville Courthouse Tragedy of 1912". Larry is a long-time NCHSC member, and past NCHSC board member and he plans to captivate us with the infamous courthouse shootout that took place in 1912 in Hillsville, Carroll County, Virginia. The story revolves around Mr. Floyd Allen who was tried for Obstruction of Justice and sentenced to a year in the penitentiary. When the Sheriff approaches Allen he rises and says "I ain't a goin' " and that's when the shooting starts. The judge, the commonwealth's attorney, the sheriff, a juror and a bystander are shot and killed by members of the Allen family. We will explore the reasons behind it all and the weapons used in the shooting.



Mr. Larry Floyd, Local Historian & Former NCHSC Officer/Board Member

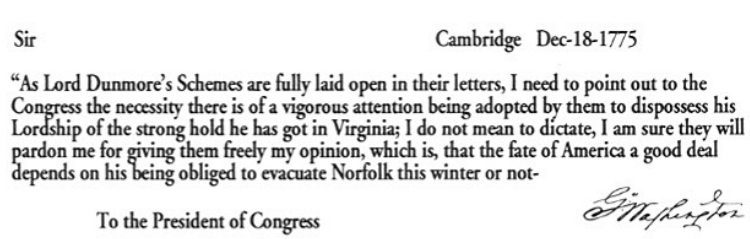
Mr. Floyd was born and raised in South Norfolk and graduated from Oscar Smith High School. His love of history started in Mr. Joe Wisinewski's American History class. He joined the Virginia State Police as a dispatcher at 19 and retired 33 years later as a Deputy Assistant Director in the State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

We look forward to seeing you at our May meeting. Light refreshments will be served. Don't forget to bring a friend!

A Vision Perseveres, Part 1

By Bud Grissom,
NCHSC Board Member





Sir Cambridge Dec-18-1775

"As Lord Dunmore's Schemes are fully laid open in their letters, I need to point out to the Congress the necessity there is of a vigorous attention being adopted by them to dispossess his Lordship of the strong hold he has got in Virginia; I do not mean to dictate, I am sure they will pardon me for giving them freely my opinion, which is, that the fate of America a good deal depends on his being obliged to evacuate Norfolk this winter or not-

To the President of Congress

By the time George Washington's words regarding Dunmore and the fate of America were penned, Colonel Woodford of the 2nd Virginia Regiment had already reported to Edmund Pendleton, President of the Convention in Williamsburg, that the British breastworks in Norfolk had been abandoned. Lord Dunmore's forces had fled to their ships, marking a turning point in the fight for American independence.

On January 1, 1776, still reeling from his defeat at the Battle of Great Bridge just weeks earlier on December 9, Dunmore ordered the bombardment of Norfolk from the river. Seizing the moment, Patriot forces set fire to the homes and buildings they believed to be Loyalist-owned. By February, only one structure remained standing—St. Paul's Episcopal Church—its enduring brick wall still bearing the embedded cannonball from that fateful day. Dunmore, as a result, set sail from Virginia thus ending Great Britain's rule over the colony for good. Independence was now in sight.

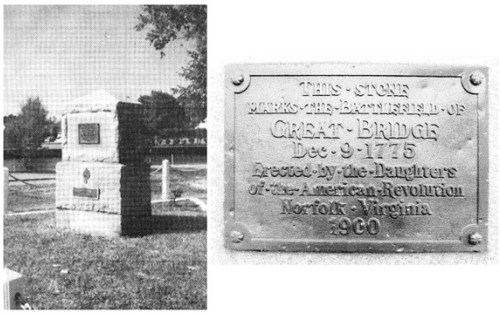
The Patriot victory at Great Bridge—Virginia's first land battle of the Revolution -- drove the British from Norfolk and denied them control of the colony's largest seaport between New York and Charleston, South Carolina. As a result of the victory, Patriots and Convention Delegates were encouraged and morale was so boosted that on December 13, 1775, the fourth Virginia convention voted to adopt and publicize, for the first time, a declaration expressing a spirit of freedom and a call to arms. Its structure consists of 5 parts, similar to the structure of the Declaration of Independence, which was signed just a short seven months later.

Buoyed by this success, Virginia expanded its army and built a navy. In December 1776, Virginia and North Carolina troops sailed from Hampton Roads to support Washington's struggling forces, playing a vital role in the surprise attack on Trenton that renewed faith in his leadership. Five years later, the British surrendered at Yorktown.

Norfolk County's significance in the Revolution cannot be overstated. For too long, the Battle of Great Bridge—fought in what is now Chesapeake, Virginia—went underrecognized, despite the efforts of dedicated historians and citizens. But that tide began to turn thanks to their persistence.

In 1900, the newly formed Great Bridge Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) erected a monument commemorating the battle's 125th anniversary. Originally placed on the southwest side of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, the monument was moved twice --

once in 1942 for a new bridge, and again in 1964 to the civic center. Thanks to the efforts of my father, E. Preston Grissom and the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Foundation, the monument was recently returned to its original site on the southwest side of the canal where the patriot breastworks once stood. The original location of the battle was reconfirmed by the Foundation through a study performed in 2005. Plans are underway for an interpretive exhibit at the site, featuring reconstructed breastworks, dedicated monuments, and educational panels honoring the battle's key figures.



Great Bridge Monument Located on
North Side of the Canal in the NW Quadrant

In 1952, as part of Virginia's 350th anniversary celebrations, the Norfolk County Board of Supervisors commissioned a diorama of the Battle of Great Bridge by South Carolina artist Robert N. S. Whitlaw. Initially displayed at the Norfolk Museum of Arts and Sciences, the model moved to the Chesapeake Civic Center Planetarium and later to the city's Central Library—where it was sadly destroyed in 2007. Thankfully, the figurines were salvaged and remain in storage, awaiting a new display.



Image of the 1952 Diorama of the Battle of Great Bridge

In 1963, following the merger of Norfolk County and South Norfolk, the Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake was founded to preserve the area's rich legacy. That same year, the Society's historical committee, led by the late Judge Charles B. Cross, began planning an ambitious reconstruction of the 18th-century Village of Great Bridge. The vision included period homes, taverns, a causeway, the British stockade, and Patriot breastworks—culminating in an outdoor drama and visitors' center, all to be completed by 1976. Sadly, the project was derailed by budget limitations and shifting city priorities.

Efforts were revived in the 1980s, with a new proposal for an outdoor historical drama, but again, city council priorities halted its progress. Still, the story didn't end there. The decades since have seen unprecedented strides in preserving the site of Virginia's first Revolutionary War land battle.

Stay tuned for Part 2 in our September newsletter, where we'll explore the tireless work of individuals and organizations who made today's progress possible.

Remembering Tim Bonney: Friend, Mentor, and Tireless Champion of Norfolk County's Past

By Susan Ward Fleming,
NCHSC Board Member & Wallace Room Volunteer

A good friend and supporter of historical preservation, Truitt "Tim" Morris Bonney died on October 25, 2024.

Born in 1944 in Portsmouth, Virginia, Tim graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School and worked at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard until his retirement. He had a continuing passion for local history that he put to use in researching local cemeteries and county records.

I met Tim around 2004, and we instantly became friends. Around 2008 I partnered with Tim and Donna Bluemink to correct records in Norfolk cemeteries and to work on the genealogy of people buried in Elmwood and Cedar Grove Cemeteries. Tim had crusaded for the preservation of Norfolk cemeteries for decades. He served on the board of Friends of the Norfolk Historical Cemeteries, a nonprofit organization instrumental in preserving the integrity of the cemeteries, maintaining their historic carriage paths, and restoring monuments. He also led tours to educate the public on the families buried there. With Sharon Rea Gable, he coauthored 18 books on historical records of Norfolk County and the surrounding area. The books were gifted to the NCHSC by both authors. Tim's contributions to the preservation of history are far too many for me document here.



Truitt "Tim" Morris Bonney,
1944-2024

At the time of Tim's passing, he was kind enough to leave me his research files. I am slowly going through them and will integrate what I can into the Wallace Room Collection. I am also posting much of it on *FindaGrave.com* for public use.

Tim was a mentor and friend to me and to many other people as well. He will be dearly missed.

Shop NCHSC publications for sale at our Amazon.com Storefront!

https://www.amazon.com/s?me=A2NZFQ9MGEZ94B&marketplaceID=ATVPDKIKX0DER

Charming Photo Needs Your Assistance

By Amy Williamson Jonak,
NCHSC Wallace Room Volunteer

This adorable photo was taken circa 1939, at Oak Grove United Methodist, near Great Bridge, in old Norfolk County, Virginia. The inscription on the back identifies the children. Front row, left to right: Shirley Paxson, Norma Jones, Vivian Old, Alice Neal Sawyer and Wayne Hogge. Back row, left to right: Rosalie Ward and three unidentified boys. The number 2 is written in the top right corner, and the number 4 is stamped or printed in the bottom right corner.

Who are the three little boys on the back row? The two on the right could be twins! If you know, or have a clue, email us at www.norfolkcountyvahistory.org.

The photograph reminds me of photos I've seen from Oak Grove Methodist Church -- probably photos of Sunday school classes. The first little girl on the bottom row, Shirley Paxson, was born in 1935. If she's 4, then the photo is from about 1939.



Photo courtesy of Mary Lewis Williamson (Shirley's childhood friend)

Discovery of a Historic Grave on Benefit Road

By Susan Ward Fleming,
NCHSC Board Member & Wallace Room Volunteer



Headstone of Calvin Graves
near Benefit Road

In March, Kay Ziegler and I received a tip regarding a possible unrecorded grave located at 2652 Benefit Road. We visited the property and were warmly welcomed by the homeowner, Heidi, who graciously spoke with us about the grave site.

Our investigation revealed that the grave holds historical significance—it is the final resting place of a U.S. Colored Troop veteran, Calvin Graves (Calvin Graves CO B 22 USC INF**).** Through our research, we discovered that the headstone for Calvin Graves was requested by his daughter, Nancy Graves Brinkley, and was originally delivered to Whitehouse Cemetery.

To gather more local context, we visited Doris Stewart in Bear Quarters, who confirmed that the house on the property was historically known as "The White House." According to records found on *Ancestry.com*, Calvin Graves was born on February 13, 1836, and passed away on April 6, 1928.

We are honored to document and preserve the memory of Calvin Graves by adding his grave to our list of known historic burials. His service and life are a meaningful part of our shared local and national history.

At this time, only one headstone has been found on the property, and if additional burials exist, they remain unmarked. If you have information about this site or possible graves there, contact us at nchs.wallaceroom@gmail.com

NCHSC First Families Program

Does your family tree have deep roots in Tidewater? If your ancestors resided in Norfolk County from 1636 to 1876, you may be eligible for membership in our genealogy program *First Families of Norfolk County, Virginia*. The First Families Program provides a way to preserve your family history research as part of our genealogy collection and to honor your Norfolk County ancestors.

See our web site or contact us for details: **www.norfolkcountyvahistory.org**

Memories from the NCHSC Annual Membership Luncheon on April 4, 2025

Our membership luncheon at the beautiful Garrett Plantation House was a great success! Steve Forrest, Historian from Historic Fort Norfolk, presented "The Battle of Craney Island", and Southland Restaurant and Catering served a tasty lunch. Here are a few photos courtesy of NCHCS Wallace Room Volunteer Miyuki Edwards.

