



The Historian

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia

Summer

September 2024

Volume 29, Issue 3

Dear Members and Friends,

This summer has been sweltering, it has felt like an oven outside! Even the trees are looking for shade! As a historian, I have read many accounts of summers past, but they do not always give us the strong adjectives to describe what we all have experienced these last few months. Lucky for us, the air conditioning works very well at the library. AC, in my opinion, was the best invention of the 20th century!

Interestingly, the Algonquin Indians in Virginia called summer, Messinough, or roasting ear time. Sometimes driving in Chesapeake one can smell the musty odor of corn pollen that lies heavy in the evenings at dusk. That smell comes from the tassels on the corn. I remember this scent around the cornfields on Elbow Road at the farm of my Uncle Kenny and Aunt Eva Butt. There is also nothing like the smell of fresh cut grass on a summer day. It's a sweet scent that fills the summer air. Unlike the extreme heat, these familiar scents always bring back pleasant memories of summer. This is what I remember during the summer months, past and present here in Norfolk County.

You'll be glad to know our fantastic staff of volunteers has been faithful to the Wallace Room throughout the summer. You will find most of us gathering on Wednesdays, filing, cataloging, and mending old documents. I enjoy listening to the snappy conversation our volunteers have and believe me, it is snappy! It's wonderful to be part of such a dedicated group who enjoy working together to preserve history.

We've been busy with other activities, too. Our annual gathering in May at the beautiful Garrett Plantation in Deep Creek was a wonderful success, and the Model-T rally/tour of rural Chesapeake was great fun.

Continued next page.

Calendar of Events

September 2024

Closed

31 Aug -- 3 Sept

NCHSC Board Meeting via ZOOM
10 Sep 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
15 Sep 2:00pm

October 2024

Closed

14 Oct

November 2024

Closed

5 Nov & 11 Nov

NCHSC Board Meeting via ZOOM
12 Nov 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
17 Nov 2:00pm

Closed

27 Nov -- 1 Dec

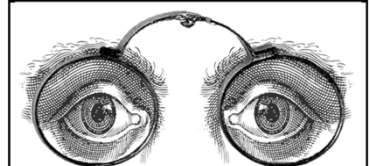
December 2024

Battle of Great Bridge Reenactment
8 Dec 10am -- 4pm
9 Dec 10am -- 2pm

Closed

24 Dec 2024 -- 2 Jan 2025

Wallace Memorial History Room



Where Archival Curiosities Abound!

President's Letter, *Continued*

This summer we received many donations, both large and small. We received a box of items, papers, and photographs of a family that lived on Ballentine Place. The box of items came from California. Inside the box were fantastic photographs and memorabilia of old Knox Presbyterian Church. As I was preparing to arrange this assortment of items, I paused to wonder how these individuals would feel about people like me, probing through their personal letters and family photographs. Each of these special items tells a story about lives lived long ago. I hope they would be happy we are preserving their history in our Wallace Memorial History Room.

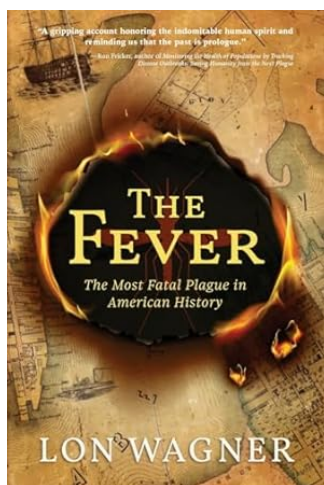
As we look forward to fall and some cooler weather, be sure to stay tuned for our upcoming events. Join us for our membership meeting on September 15th. Our guest speaker, Mr. Lon Wagner, will be talking about his new book *The Fever: The Most Fatal Plague in American History*. We are also planning a fall fundraiser – a cemetery tour – for November 2nd and 3rd. Be sure to check our web site at www.norfolkcountyvahistory.org and follow us on Facebook for details!

Robert B. Hitchings, NCHSC President

Mr. Lon Wagner to be Guest Speaker at September Membership Meeting

We are pleased to welcome Mr. Lon Wagner -- author, journalist, and Senior Director of Communications and Marketing at Virginia Tech -- to our membership meeting on September 15, 2024. Mr. Wagner will discuss his new book *The Fever: The Most Fatal Plague in American History*.

In June 1855, the steamer *Benjamin Franklin* arrived at the Gosport Navy Yard from St. Thomas and docked for repairs. Although the steamer was boarded and inspected multiple times by local health officials, the ship's captain concealed all signs of Yellow Fever on his ship. The deception unleashed an epidemic that killed almost 40 percent of the populations of Norfolk and Portsmouth.



Mr. Lon Wagner
(Photo from
KoehlerBooks.com)

Mr. Wagner graduated with a Bachelor of Arts, English-journalism from the University of Delaware and a Master of Science, Applied Linguistics from the University of Edinburgh. He has been twice nominated for the Pulitzer Prize – once for his 14-part series in the *Virginian-Pilot* about the Yellow Fever epidemic. Mr. Wagner will be selling and signing copies of his book after the presentation.

Be sure to join us on September 15, 2024, at 2pm at the Chesapeake Central Library for what promises to be an informative and engaging discussion. Be sure to bring a friend! We hope to see you there!

More On the Hanbury Family Cemetery

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

On July 15th, 2024, Kay Ziegler, Jessica Cosmos, and I met with Joe Pulley at 208 Peaceful Road. Mr. Pulley, of Home Associates of Virginia, is the contractor developing this farm formerly owned by the Ashburn family. The farmhouse on the property was built in 1870, but condition of the structure is poor and beyond saving, so it will be torn down to make room for a new 100-acre development (Zoned PUD). Also located on this property is the Hanbury Family Cemetery.

Kay and I first visited the Ashburn farm in October 2023 and reported our findings in the February 2024 NCHSC newsletter. At that time, we only found one stone with a death date on it belonging to Joseph Hanbury and the remains of at least two other graves that were caved in. Mr. Ashburn, the former owner, informed us that there were originally four stones, a mother, father and two children. He could not provide names. We researched deeds to confirm that this was formerly the Miles Hanbury property, which was inherited by his sons, one of them being Joseph Hanbury.

On our second visit in July, there was another stone uncovered with dates on it, and from these dates we were able to confirm that the stone belongs to Mary Octavia Gammon Hanbury, Joseph's second wife. Mary died on January 14, 1886, at 33 years of age.



Mr. Joe Pulley, Kay Ziegler, and Jessica Cosmos
at the Hanbury Family Cemetery
(Photo by Suzy Ward Fleming)

Mr. Pulley allowed us to do a soft probe of the cemetery and discuss our findings. He has plans to preserve the cemetery and enclose it within a fence for protection. We spoke to Mr. Pulley about the possibility of using ground penetrating radar to confirm the number of graves unmarked on the site. He seemed very receptive to this idea and stated that we could have a copy of the report when it is done.

Find NCHSC publications for sale at our storefront on Amazon.com!

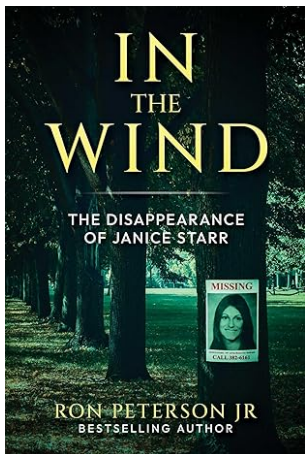
<https://www.amazon.com/s?me=A2NZFQ9MGEZ94B&marketplaceID=ATVPDKIKX0DER>

A Local Who-Done-It Hits the Bookshelves

By Terry Riggs,

Chesapeake Police Dept retired, NCHSC Board Member & Wallace Room Volunteer

A book has just been released titled "*In the Wind*" by Ron Peterson Jr. available on Amazon. This is Peterson's third book about murder cases in the Tidewater area. "*In the Wind*" focuses on a 1981 Chesapeake missing-persons case of Old Dominion University student, Janice Starr.



Chesapeake Detective, Kay Schucker, was assigned to the missing person's case. Detective Schucker comes to focus on Janice's ROTC instructor, Army captain Dwight Beddingfield, as a possible suspect. Beddingfield, after finding out Detective Schucker wants to interview him, drives to the South Norfolk Airport, (now the Home Depot on Battlefield Blvd.), rents a plane and flew around the area avoiding the detective until committing suicide by crashing the plane in the field beside B.M. Williams School.

The investigation uncovered an attempted insurance scam perpetrated by the ROTC instructor. Further investigation of the case led to a trip to Courtland, in Southampton County, Virginia, where a gravesite was found in a peanut field. The Forensic Team from Chesapeake Police, Sergeant Al Burns, myself, and Auxiliary Officer Garr Jones, along with Detective Schucker and Sergeant Ed Lewis weathered a recovery of Janice Starr's body on a 7-degree night. The case has many twists and turns. Those working on the case were contacted by a movie producer who films cases for a series on the *Oxygen Channel* called *Buried in My Backyard*. Detective Schucker, the forensics team, and Judge John Brown, who was a Chesapeake Commonwealth's Attorney at the time, are to meet with the movie production team at the end of August. The airing date has not been set. In the meantime, you can read all about in Peterson's book. It's a great read!

When Pigs Fly?!

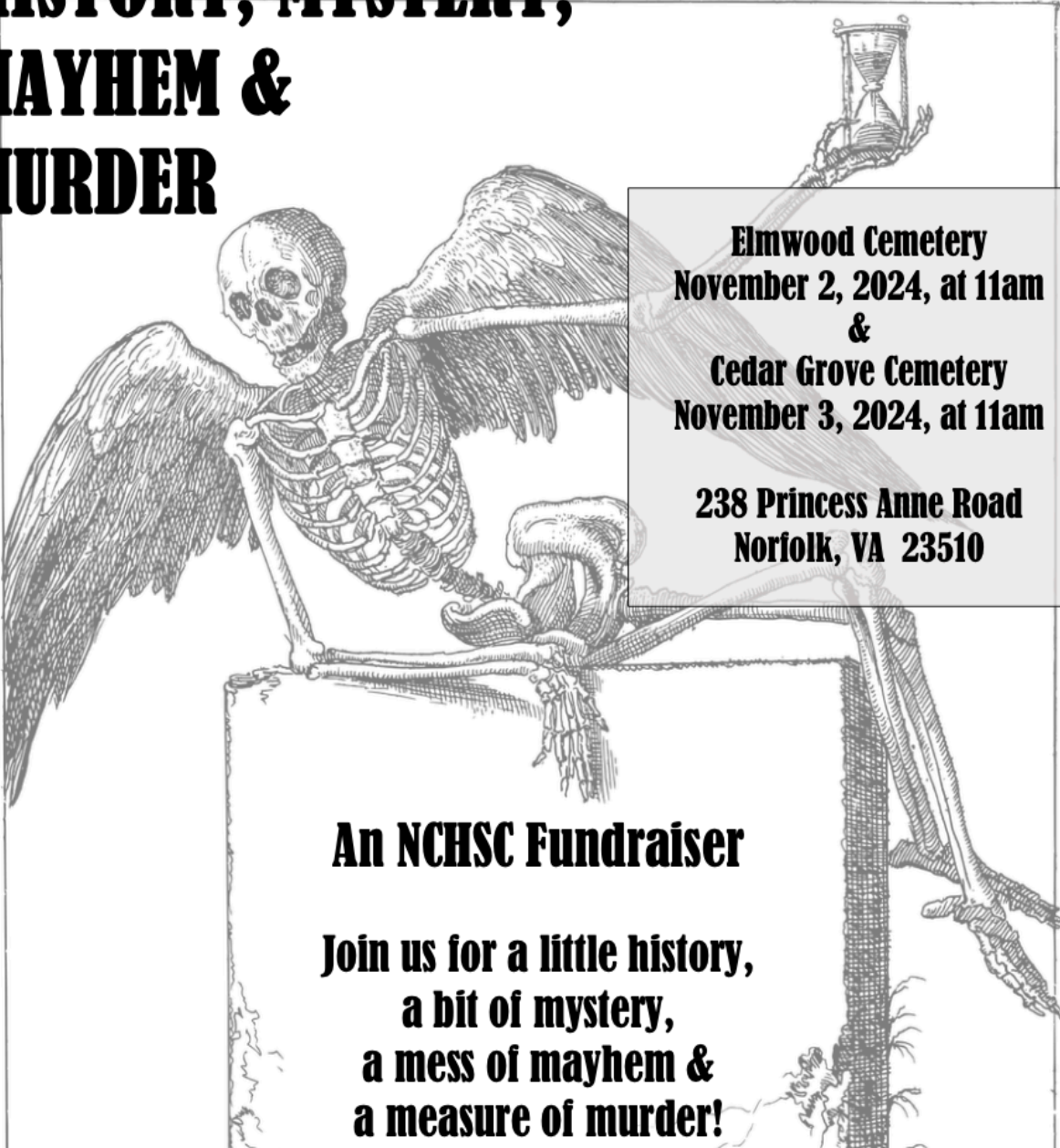
By Robert B. Hitchings,

NCHSC President & Archivist/Historian

Ghent is a beautiful suburb of Norfolk. It was started in the 1890s with beautiful homes but back in 1867, Ghent was a series of small farms. The largest farm was Richard Drummond's farm. Many farm houses were small and log cabins were part of the landscape. On March 30, 1867, the *Virginian-Pilot* reported that a large eagle, 5 feet from the tips of his wings was shot by a local African-American farm boy. The large eagle was making off with someone's pig!



HISTORY, MYSTERY, MAYHEM & MURDER



**Elmwood Cemetery
November 2, 2024, at 11am
&
Cedar Grove Cemetery
November 3, 2024, at 11am**

**238 Princess Anne Road
Norfolk, VA 23510**

An NCHSC Fundraiser

**Join us for a little history,
a bit of mystery,
a mess of mayhem &
a measure of murder!**

**Donations Kindly Requested to Benefit
the Norfolk County Historical Society
of Chesapeake, Virginia**



See our web site for details: www.norfolkcountyvahistory.org

My Friend Brantley Walker (1930-2024)

By Robert B. Hitchings,
NCHSC President & Archivist/Historian

About 22 years ago Brantley Walker, elderly, white-haired man, walked into the Sargeant Memorial Room at the Kirn Library in downtown Norfolk. I was the archivist and historian there in those days. He had been doing research on a section of Norfolk called Atlantic City where he had once lived. Atlantic City had been a thriving area of Norfolk County after the Civil War and was also the area in which Fort Norfolk (1791) is located. Atlantic City would later be annexed to the city of Norfolk in 1892. Today, what use to be known as Atlantic City is now known as Harbor's Edge.

When he walked into the Sargeant Room that day he was astonished that I knew all about Atlantic City. Our friendship grew when I told him that my family had once lived in Atlantic City. My great-grandfather Richard V. Hitchings (1848-1906) owned a grocery and ship chandler business right across the street from the current Harbor's Edge retirement complex. That conversation, you might say, "sealed the deal" and we became close friends. I learned that he was a history lover as well as a model ship builder. He loved making old ship models for his friends. His apartment was home to 10 large ship models, and he knew the history of each one.



Mr. Brantley Walker (1930-2024)

When I retired and came to the Wallace Memorial History Room, he came too. He was always interested in our membership and our programs. Many times, when we needed a rare book or something unusual, he was there with an open wallet. He was the first to offer a donation to bring back the Ferebee-Wallace Family Bible several years ago. When we had small fundraisers, he was the first to ask, "Robert, how can I help? I want to make a donation." Being unable to move about without a walker and later a wheelchair, he was never able to attend a membership meeting, but he was there in spirit and loved keeping abreast of the NCHSC happenings by reading our newsletter.

Brantley Walker passed away, June 12, 2024, just short of his 94th birthday. He was at the Autumn Care nursing home recuperating from a bad fall. He always told me he wanted us to have his library of 190 books and over 200 binders full of history articles. He kept his promise, and I will always be so grateful for his generosity and his friendship.

Mr. Walker was a self-educated man, constantly reading and keeping up with the news. He loved his small home library and many times his research helped us out. Looking around our Wallace Memorial Room I can see traces of his generosity from maps and pictures to model ships. Brantley Walker was my friend, and he was a super friend to the Wallace Memorial History Room. He will be truly missed.

When Fine Art Came to Chesapeake

By Robert B. Hitchings,
NCHSC President & Archivist/Historian

One never knows what one might find in old newspapers. On May 28th, 1965, the *Virginian-Pilot* announced that the Norfolk Museum of Arts and Science, now The Chrysler Museum, would be sending an artmobile to the newly formed City of Chesapeake. Chesapeake was only 2 years old at that time. The artmobile would stop at three different locations in Chesapeake: Churchland Shopping Center, Great Bridge Shopping Center, and Indian River Shopping area.



"Sailing Boat, Chatou" by Vlaminck
from the Virginia Museum of Fine Art

Mrs. Dixie Lou Fisher, city librarian of Chesapeake, told the reporters that a mobile art gallery would be coming to Chesapeake for the first time. The Williams Collection, belonging to the late Adolph D. Williams of Richmond, Virginia would be on display with a few paintings from the T. Catesby Jones Collection, entitled, "Paris 20."

The special "Paris 20" exhibition of paintings contained drawings and prints of Picasso, Matisse, Braque, Rouault and Gris. Vlaminck landscapes to Campiglio's semi-realistic paintings of a woman and child and three nudes of Paris in the 1920s would also be exhibited. Mrs. Fisher reported that a painting by Amadeo Modigliani, one of the era's most scandalous artists of his day, would be on display. He apparently was known for his nude paintings. All these paintings tell us a story of these famous artists and what Paris was like in the 1920s.



"Pigeon on a Perch" by Picasso
from the Virginia Museum of Fine Art

Two years prior to the artmobile exhibit coming to Chesapeake, Chesapeake Library became the first in the state to loan out reproductions of famous artwork to their patrons. Rembrandt's self-portrait was quite a favorite with local residents.

The week-long visit of the artmobile ended on June 1, 1965, with 650 citizens of Chesapeake attending. What each citizen thought, we do not know, but "Paris 20" was a big hit at the Norfolk Museum, and a successful "Artmobile" here in Chesapeake.

A Few Photos from Our Annual Dinner, May 4, 2024, at the Garrett Plantation

