The Historian

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia

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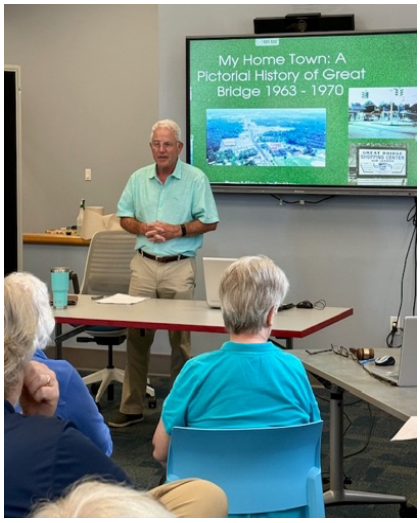
Dear Members and Friends,

The Norfolk County Historical Society held its September Membership Meeting, drawing a wonderful turnout of about 45 attendees, plus several who joined us online. Chesapeake native Jimmy Bradshaw served as our guest speaker and delivered an engaging PowerPoint presentation titled *The History of Great Bridge in Maps and Photographs.* Our volunteers once again went above and beyond, providing a table filled with festive and delicious refreshments for all to enjoy.

During the meeting, I asked our volunteers to stand and be recognized. I noted that each of them proudly wore their NCHSC polo shirts. It was a beautiful sight. A certain calm came over me that day as I looked out into the audience and saw all our members and volunteers together. The word *camaraderie* came to mind. *Camaraderie* -- it's such a beautiful word in our English language and should be practiced more often in today's society.



September Guest Speaker
Jim Bradshaw
(Photo by Amy Williamson Jonak)

According to Webster's Dictionary, *camaraderie* has a special meaning: coming together with a spirit of mutual trust, friendship, and goodwill among people who spend time together. It fosters closeness and collaboration within a group—a feeling of companionship and positive, friendly relationships. You often hear the word used

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Calendar of Events

November 2025
Closed
4, 11 Nov
26 -- 30 Nov

NCHSC Board Meeting via Google
11 Nov 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
16 Nov 2:00pm

December 2025
Battle of Great Bridge
Reenactment
6 Dec 10am to 4pm
7 Dec 10am to 2pm

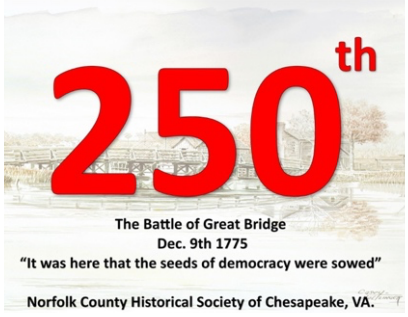
Closed
24 – 31

January 2026
Closed
1, 19 Jan

February 2026
NCHSC Board Meeting via Google
9 Feb 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
15 Feb 2:00pm

Closed
16 Feb



in sports, among teammates, soldiers, and co-workers. But to me, *camaraderie* perfectly describes **who we are**—the Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake. As a society, we've been around a long time and continue to grow. We are unique because we come together as a family.

As your president, I feel truly fortunate to have all of you standing behind me, and I want you to know that I proudly stand beside you as well. Thank you for your camaraderie and for everything each of you do for our Historical Society.



Refreshments and Fall Table Décor
at September Meeting
(Photo by Amy Williamson Jonak)

As I mentioned in our last newsletter, this year marks the **250th Anniversary of the Battle of Great Bridge.** Our Wallace Room volunteers have been hard at work preparing for our 250th display in the Wallace History Room. They have uncovered, from our vault, some rare King George III documents, showcasing the time when we were still a British colony. The Wallace History Room will also feature a chronological display of photographs depicting the battle, and our friend, "movie star" James Dean (in cut-out form), may make an appearance as a patriot, welcoming visitors to our room.

The NCHSC will be present at the reenactment of the Battle of Great Bridge on December 6th and 7th at Chesapeake's Battlefield Park South. We hope you'll stop by our tent and say hello. If you'd like to volunteer to help man the tent please contact the Wallace History Room.

We appreciate your support for the 250th Anniversary of the Battle of Great Bridge! Our dedicated volunteers and members have been busy delivering beautiful, full-color posters to local businesses throughout Great Bridge to remind the community of this important historic milestone.

Before I close, I'd like to say once more to all our members, supporters, and volunteers: *Camaraderie* is the word.

With Warmest Regards,

Robert B. Hitchings
President, Norfolk County Historical Society

"History Beneath Our Feet: A Metal Detectorist's Tales" Featured at Membership Meeting

Please join us at the Chesapeake Central Library on November 16th at 2:00 pm as we welcome guest speaker Greg Stoeger. Mr. Stoeger will present a "show and tell" about his many discoveries while metal detecting.



Greg Stoeger, Metal Detectorist, to Speak at November Meeting

Greg Stoeger, a retired U.S. Navy Reservist, amateur historian, and passionate metal detectorist, has had his discoveries featured in newspapers, magazines, and local TV segments. What began as a search for property stakes on land near Wintergreen, Virginia sparked a deeper interest in history after he learned that the City of Suffolk was occupied by Union forces during the Civil War. His first find—a .58 caliber three-ring Minié Ball at Lake Meade Park—ignited a lasting passion for uncovering the past.

For nearly five years, Stoeger has pursued metal detecting purely for historical interest, never for profit. He has helped recover lost items ranging from phones and wallets to jewelry and wedding rings, often returning historically or personally significant finds in shadowboxes for families. He also offers free metal detecting services to homeowners and landowners curious about what lies beneath their soil. For Stoeger, the greatest reward is connecting people to the past, one discovery at a time.

His adventures extend beyond Virginia, including trips across the U.S. and England, where he has uncovered Roman and Medieval coins and artifacts. Stoeger shares his discoveries on his Facebook page, *All Terrain Metal Detecting – Greg Stoeger*.

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

Shop for NCHSC publications in the Wallace Room and at our Amazon Storefront

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

My Friend, Jean Spencer

Editor's Note: *The NCHSC recently lost a friend and a true VIP. Jean Silvester Spencer, long-time NCHSC Secretary and board member, passed away earlier this year. We asked Frances Griffin, fellow NCHSC board member and Jean's friend for over 50 years, to remember Jean and share how much she meant to all of us.*

By Frances Griffin,
NCHSC Board Member



Jean Silvester Spencer, NCHSC Secretary and Board Member (Photo Courtesy of Altmeyer Funeral Home)

I first met Jean Spencer in the early 1960s at a genealogical workshop in the Deep Creek section of Chesapeake, Virginia. We both were living in Deep Creek at the time, and "our chemistry" fostered a deep understanding and a strong bond of friendship that lasted for over five decades. And it all started at a genealogical workshop in Deep Creek.

Later we started researching together on Saturdays. It was a most enjoyable time for both of us. Our children were grown, and we were able to turn our attention to genealogy. It was in Pasquotank County, NC, that we discovered we had roots here in this place. We both discovered to our amazement that we were remote cousins, from two men, two sons of a man named Joe Brothers of Pasquotank County, a farmer and a devoted Quaker. We both were stunned to find this out. This is how we became great friends, 5th cousins twice removed. We then became "Sisters of Heart."

Jean later moved to Elizabeth City, NC. However, that did not stop us from doing research together. We discovered many libraries not only in North Carolina, but here in Virginia that we visited. Somehow, our schedules were flexible enough to be able to get together for our hobby. And afterwards a nice, delicious lunch would follow. We were sisters, and believe me, we had "Lots of Fun."

In the 1960s I was living in Chesapeake, and I joined the Norfolk County Historical Society under the leadership of Henrietta Hudgins, President. She was w-o-n-d-e-r-f-u-l. Jean became a member of our society when Joe Law was President. He too worked for the Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth where Jean had worked. Later we became board members of the historical society together. We both watched our society grow, especially the Wallace Memorial History Room. Jean was mighty proud of our society and a great member.

I was so blessed to have had Jean Spencer in my life. She was a devoted friend and sister. I miss our phone calls and the fun trips we had together so long ago. But most of all, I miss her humor and her fun side of life.

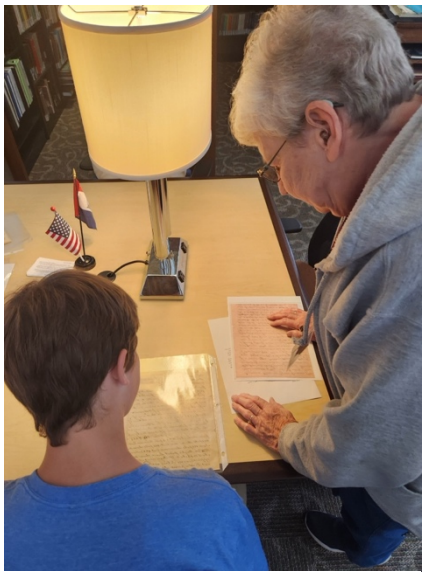
Young Patriots in Action: Discovering History in the Wallace History Room

By Lori Pickett,
NCHSC Board Member & Newsletter Editor
(Photos courtesy of Heather Barlow, C.A.R. Leader)



Jackson Holds a Piece of
Revolutionary War History
on Display in the Wallace Room

On September 28, 2025, five members of The Old Cannonball Chapter, C.A.R. – Anna, Dani, Jackson, Robert, and Stella -- gathered for their first meeting of the 2025–2026 year in the NCHSC Wallace History Room, hosted by Kay Ziegler, Wallace Room Manager. The students were thrilled to handle original documents from the Revolutionary War era, examining the handwriting, seals, and watermarks that brought history off the page and into the present. They discussed how to carefully preserve these invaluable records, gaining hands-on insight into the work of historians and archivists.



Kay Ziegler, Wallace Room Manager,
Shares Discoveries from the
Wallace Room with C.A.R. Members

The Children of the American Revolution (C.A.R.), the nation's oldest and largest patriotic youth organization, teaches its members the importance of service, patriotism, and understanding our American heritage. For these students, the meeting was more than a lesson in history—it was an unforgettable opportunity to connect directly with the past and experience the stories of our nation in a tangible, meaningful way.



C.A.R. Members Stella and Robert Learn
About Map Preservation

The Importance of Preserving Historical Documents

By Kay Ziegler,
Wallace Room Manager

Our volunteers have been hard at work transcribing 18th-century documents, focusing on the reign of King George III. Many of these documents feature watermarks and seals, and they contain names that will be familiar to families in Norfolk County, including Ferebee, Portlock, Butt, Etheridge, Wormington, Hanbury, and others. These records trace the transition from British colony to the birth of America, and some even include the signatures of notable figures such as Benjamin Franklin and James Madison. It is truly eye-opening to realize that these documents were created during the very formation of our democracy!



Example of Preserved Colonial Era Documents in the Wallace Memorial History Room

Exciting News for Researchers: Microfilm Access at the Wallace Room

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

I am pleased to share that the Wallace History Room at the Norfolk County Historical Society can now order microfilm directly from the Library of Virginia in Richmond. The Library of Virginia has officially recognized us as a credited library, so we no longer have to go through the Chesapeake Central Library.

This is wonderful news for our dedicated researchers. Microfilm can now be delivered straight to the Wallace Memorial History Room, saving the long drive to Richmond. Within a week, researchers can have their requested materials in hand, ready for study.

Last month, one of our board members was the first to take advantage of this service. She ordered the *Minute Books (1805–1820) of Matthews & Gloucester Counties, Virginia*, in search of her long-lost ancestors. The shipment included five small boxes of microfilm. I can truly say she was a "happy camper," as she found the information she needed for her family genealogy—all without leaving Chesapeake! The only cost was postage to return the microfilm to the Library of Virginia.

Exciting News for Researchers: Microfilm Access at the Wallace Room, *Continued*

Now, researchers can order microfilm of Virginia counties as well as historic Virginia newspapers, including the *Ledger Dispatch*, *Portsmouth Star*, and more. This is a tremendous resource to support our members in their genealogical research and local history studies.

Yes, my friends, this is truly a major plus for the NCHSC!

Road Trip to Chillicothe, OH: Exploring the Revolutionary War Cannon

By Miyuki Edwards,
Wallace Room Volunteer

On August 18, 2025, Robert Hitchings, Kay Ziegler, and I set out on an adventure to Chillicothe, Ohio, to meet with the Ross County Historical Society. Our trip was part of preparations for the 250th celebration of the Battle of Great Bridge and focused on the possible one-year loan of a Revolutionary War cannon from the December 9, 1775, battle.

We hit the road early to avoid traffic, and lively conversation made the miles fly by. Traveling through the rolling landscapes of Virginia and West Virginia into Ohio offered a scenic and enjoyable journey. Upon arriving at our Airbnb, we had time to explore the quiet town. Charming 18th-century homes lined the streets, interspersed with a surprising number of "For Sale" signs, and the evening air was perfect for a leisurely stroll before dinner.

The cannon itself, displayed outside the historical society building, was modest in appearance. Resting on a concrete pedestal, its plaque had been worn by years of exposure to the elements. After photographing the piece of history, we enjoyed dinner at a local restaurant.



Cannon at the Ross County Historical Society in Chillicothe, OH

The next morning brought a chance to explore Chillicothe further. The town was quiet on a Tuesday, with some shops closed. We noticed a mill with a red-and-white striped smokestack that was not operating, sparking curiosity about its history. Later, in our meeting with the Ross County Historical Society, we received exciting news: the cannon could be brought to Virginia!

Road Trip to Chillicothe, OH: Exploring the Revolutionary War Cannon, *Continued*

The loan comes with conditions: NCHSC must obtain an appraisal, insure the cannon, provide a display plan at the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways Museum, and demonstrate proper security. We are confident we can meet all these requirements.

During the meeting, the NCHSC members also uncovered more about the cannon's past. John Seip, an investor, discovered the cannon in 1901 while helping to drain a swamp on 15,000 acres he and other investors purchased in the Wallaceton area of Norfolk County. Seip was also involved in a lumber company in Moyock, North Carolina.

Kay and Robert continue to examine maps, deeds, and property records, uncovering newspaper articles from Chillicothe that document Seip's property purchases, the cannon's discovery, and references to the Battle of Great Bridge. Interestingly, Norfolk County/Chesapeake published nothing about the cannon until the 1980s, raising questions about why it was never officially recognized as a historical find or appraised by Chillicothe. Meanwhile, I and other researchers have uncovered additional fascinating details about both the cannon and John Seip.

This journey reminds us that history is alive—not just in books or documents, but in the places, we travel, the people we meet, and the stories we uncover.

We'll provide updates on this project in future newsletters!

Valor at the Causeway: A Pindaric Ode to the Battle of Great Bridge

A hot action begun by Lord Dunmore,
"Liberty or Death" the serpent said,
Its banner flying at Liberty's head.
A causeway witnesses a mighty roar.
Regulars, Culpeper and Tar Heels too,
Proved that the tyrants would soon be few.
The battle was joined and the action was short,
When the fight ended the King lost a port.
The morass focused the Patriot's fire,
To the King's warriors, the causeway a pyre.
Sacrifice and Valor, etched in History evermore.
As the smoke cleared, nary a Briton on Virginia's shore.

--- Mr. Scott Aiken, SAR Member