



# The Historian

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia

Winter

February 2021

Volume 26, Issue 1

Dear Members,

It was quite a year! Coronavirus sure has made headlines throughout our country and the world. 2020 will go down as a year all of us will not want to look back upon. With so many businesses, restaurants, and libraries in our area closing, it has made life difficult at times just to get things done. However, I must say that since June our Chesapeake Public Library System, especially our Central Library, has been open and operating each and every day. We all have practiced social distancing and mask wearing in order to remain safe and to stay open for our patrons. The Wallace History Room has also remained open since June and we have done remarkably well, not only with our patrons, but with new visitors who just wanted to pop in to see our history room. I have been pleased to see so many new folks visiting us throughout this past year.

Back in December NCHSC held its annual Christmas party at Traditions here in Chesapeake. If you missed our annual party, you all missed a great night. We had 28 members and guests who turned out for our Christmas party or as I like to say, "our holiday treat." Historian, Rob Garnett, gave us a super PowerPoint presentation on the beginnings of Santa Claus during the Civil War. Members and guests in attendance were decked out in colorful masks and a few facial shields. We all looked a bit funny but we all played it safe. Whoever looks back at our Christmas pictures 20 years from now will sure get a laugh. Who were all those masked people?

As you all know, I am the eternal optimist and I believe better days are ahead of us. Furthermore, I cannot look back at this past year with complete doom and gloom as our Wallace History Room remained open to the public when other libraries have had to close

## Calendar of Events

### February 2021

NCHSC Board Meeting  
9 Feb 6:00pm

Library Closed

15 Feb

### **NCHSC Membership Meeting**

**Via ZOOM**  
**21 Feb 2:00pm**

### March 2021

Library Closed  
12 Mar

### April 2021

Library Closed  
4 Apr

### May 2021

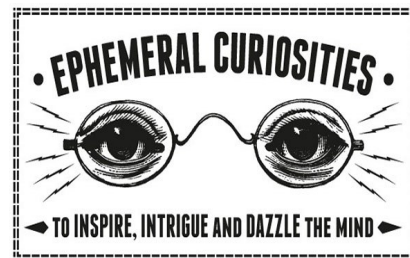
NCHSC Board Meeting  
11 May 6:00pm

### **NCHSC Membership Meeting**

**16 May 2:00pm**

Library Closed

30 & 31 May



**Wallace Memorial Room**

*Continued on Page 2*

## President's Letter, *Continued*

their doors. In 2020 we made many new friends by being open. We also continued to receive donations by helping others in their genealogy and deed research. None of this could have been possible without our dedicated NCHSC volunteers keeping the room safe and open. For that I will be forever grateful.

Robert Hitchings, President

## Nancy Harwood Garrett Family History Collection Added to Wallace Room

By P. S. Vredenburg,  
Wallace Room Volunteer

In October 2020, the NCHSC received an extraordinary family history donation from genealogist, historian and eastern shore resident Nancy Wescoat Harwood Garrett. The collection is a culmination of over 25 years of genealogy research on Ms. Garrett's Northampton County and Portsmouth, Virginia families. It documents 49 family names in more than 3,000 pages of family histories, family tree charts, notes, and other content from a variety of internet and personal sources.

Nancy Harwood Garrett, daughter of Richard Henry Harwood III and Nancy Goffigon Wescoat of Northampton County, VA, was born on September 16, 1937 in Portsmouth, VA. She spent her youth between Portsmouth and her mother's family home, Cherry Grove Farm, in Northampton County. After graduating from college, she married and raised her family in Portsmouth.



Painting of Cherry Grove Farm, Family Home of Nancy Harwood Garrett

Ms. Garrett returned to live on the eastern shore in 1985 and, since then, has been documenting her family as well as other eastern shore families. She has helped promote the Accomack Library in organizing a research room (genealogy) for patrons. She is also active in preserving historic structures and in sharing the history of the eastern shore.

Her collection details her connections to other early eastern shore Virginia families, many of whom have descendants who migrated and settled here in Norfolk County, now the City of Chesapeake. It is an honor and privilege to have her "Eastern Shore Genealogies" added to our Wallace Room family history collection.

## NCHSC Millstone Makes a Move

By Kay Ziegler,  
NCHSC Wallace Room Manager

Around 1973 a millstone was donated to the NCHSC by Daniel W. McKenney, Sr. in memory of his parents, Irene and Shepard McKenney. The story that I was told was the millstone had been found partially submerged in the water near a gas station that was located near the Great Bridge.

The grist mill at Great Bridge was a tidal mill built in 1759 by William Smith and Robert Tucker. The mill was operated by various owners until the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the remains may still be seen at low tide to the east of Battlefield Boulevard as you cross the small bridge just north of the canal bridge.

This millstone and the plaque that tells its history was on display at the southwest corner of the Chesapeake Central Library and is the property of NCHSC. The Chesapeake Environment Improvement Council (CEIC), a city agency, requested to move the millstone in front of the library entrance and offered to maintain landscaping and plantings.

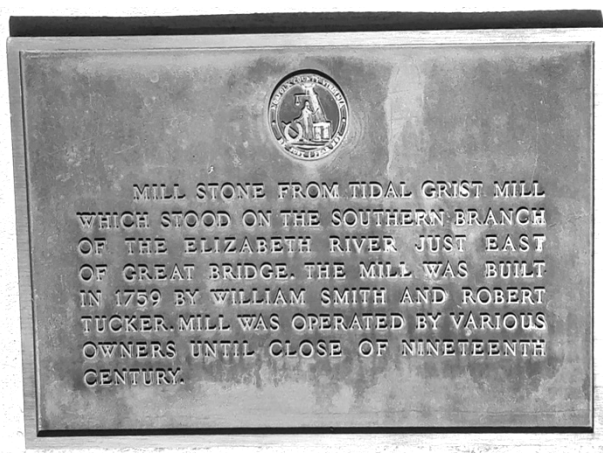
With the NCHSC approval, the millstone was moved by Bissette Construction Company on November 16, 2020. NCHSC President Robert Hitchings also arranged to have the plaque moved and placed in front of the millstone. Be sure to stop and check out this impressive item from our collection as you enter the library!



Robert Hitchings With the Millstone  
in Its New Location



Crewmen from Bissette Construction  
Lower the Millstone into Place



Plaque for the NCHSC Millstone  
Was Also Moved

## Genealogy Bright Spots in 2021

By Amy Williamson Jonak,  
Wallace Room Volunteer

Hooray, 2021 is here! Pandemic protocols still make it tough to be a genealogy buff. Courthouses, record rooms and favorite research libraries are closed or require appointments. At the very least, the rules change from week to week. As this is being written in January, Chesapeake Central Library is open but visiting time is limited to one hour and the chairs in the main library have been removed. Kudos for figuring out how to stay open and available to your patrons! We just have to be patient until in-person research gets back to the good old days of 2019. Nevertheless, two big genealogy events are on the horizon: the National Genealogical Society (NGS) 2021 Family History Conference and RootsTech Connect.

- The NGS Conference, will take place in Richmond, May 19-22 at the Greater Richmond Convention Center. It's still slated to be an in-person event, with many plans to keep attendees healthy and safe. NGS plans 175 lectures covering a rainbow of genealogy topics. Plus, now that the Federation of Genealogical Societies and NGS merged, there will be a full day of programs (May 18) for genealogy and historical societies. Get an overview of the whole event online at <https://conference.ngsgenealogy.org/> Many details, including the cost of admission, will be added in January. Even if it isn't possible to hold the event in person, NGS has the ability to switch to a virtual online conference as they did in 2020.
- RootsTech, another top national genealogy conference, is all virtual for 2021 – and it's FREE. From February 25-27, RootsTech Connect's keynote speakers, classes, and marketplace will be online. Find details and the registration form at <https://www.rootstech.org/?lang=eng>

If you can't wait until those events, here are some classes and how-to videos to enjoy right now.

- RootsTech's classes from 2020 are free and available. At the webpage listed above, click on "Video Archive" on the pink banner at the top of the page. It isn't clear what will happen to 2020's classes *after* the 2021 conference in February.
- NGS offers many genealogy resources, including several classes open to non-members, some free, some for a fee. Go to <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/> , hover over "Learning Center" at the top of the page, then click on "Free Resources" in the box that drops down.
- Ancestry.com offers subscribers "Ancestry Academy," a series of short how-to videos covering a wide range of topics.

Fun tidbit: Although I couldn't find Ancestry Academy in the library's version of Ancestry.com (in Resources A-Z), it allowed access to a home computer! Normally, library patrons can only use Ancestry.com IN library buildings. Find your bright spots wherever you can. Happy (ancestor) hunting!

## The Rule of Three

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

There is an expression, "Things come in threes." I have been in the library business for over 25 years and I can tell you from my experience that this is true.

In November, NCHSC board member, Frances Coleman Griffin, gifted the Wallace History Room a large box full of maps, blueprints, plat maps, etc. In all, we received about 80 maps of all sizes. These maps came from the estate of a local resident, Marie B. Old (1928-2018). The Old family had a real-estate business from 1940-1960 on Great Bridge Blvd. The shops are now long gone but Frances Griffin supplied a nice picture to accompany these maps. Many of these maps were from Norfolk County and date back to the early 1900s. One map of the Blackwater District of Princess Anne County measures 6 feet by 5 feet and notates the different landowners at the time. It is truly a treasure trove!

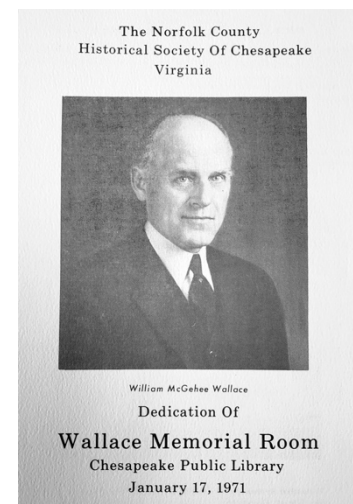
In December, Jim Bradshaw, Great Bridge native and author of *My Home Town: A Pictorial History of Great Bridge, 1963-1970*, donated his rare map collection amongst the NCHSC, the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Museum and the City of Chesapeake. I was invited by Mr. Bradshaw and Mayor West to view his collection and was allowed to select a few old and rare maps of Virginia to add to our Wallace Room collection. I chose 8 rare, local maps made by James K. Kirby (1931-1992), Assistant Planning Director for the City of Chesapeake from 1963 to 1992. Looking at these rare maps of Great Bridge, one could view the genius of Kirby, a local draftsman who at the time did everything by hand. These old maps of Great Bridge are now part of our collection.

Strange, I just received a call last week from a man, "Robert, would the Wallace Room be interested in old state maps?" Things do happen in threes.

## Wallace Memorial Room Celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The Wallace Memorial Room celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. The history room in the Central Library was dedicated on January 17, 1971. Thanks to donations from local residents and the commitment of a handful of Chesapeake citizens to collect, preserve and share our local history, the Wallace Room opened with much ceremony and a rich collection.

Fifty years later, we remain committed to our mission, and through your generosity, our Wallace Room Collection continues to grow. With your help, we will keep on preserving and sharing the history of Norfolk County and the City of Chesapeake for future generations. We thank you for your support.



Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake  
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**Please check the date on your mailing label above to make sure your membership is current. Membership dues are due by May 31st.**

Questions or suggestions? Email us at [nchs.wallaceroom@gmail.com](mailto:nchs.wallaceroom@gmail.com), call us at (757) 410-7152, or visit our site [NorfolkCountyVAHistory.org](http://NorfolkCountyVAHistory.org). Date submitted (for your records) \_\_\_\_\_

### February Membership Meeting Via ZOOM

We are planning for a socially distanced membership meeting via ZOOM at 2:00 pm on Sunday, February 21, 2021. Robert Hitchings will present a fun PowerPoint presentation on Norwegian champion women's figure skater and film star Sonja Henie (1912-1969). She won the gold medal at the 1928, 1932, and 1936 Olympic games and reigned as Ladies' World Figure Skating Champion from 1927 to 1936. She earned more Olympic titles than any other ladies' figure skater in history. As a film star, eight of her movies grossed over \$100 million dollars.

Join us for a fun afternoon!

Instructions on how to join our ZOOM meeting will be emailed to our membership email list prior to the meeting date.



1942 Image of Sonja Henie,  
World Champion Figure Skater and Film Star,  
Courtesy of the *Toronto Star*