The Historian

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia

Winter | February 2025 | Volume 30, Issue 1

Dear Members and Friends,

The Christmas holidays have come and gone, and winter has settled in as we bid farewell to 2024. Now, we embark on a sparkling new year—2025! While a new year can sometimes feel daunting, I am optimistic that 2025 will be a wonderful year for all of us and for the NCHSC. Together, we are a remarkable team!

As I write this message, I've just heard about an approaching cold snap, with the possibility of snow. Temperatures are expected to drop, reminding us that January and February are traditionally the chilliest months of the year. If our ancestors were here, they could undoubtedly share vivid tales of enduring harsh winters. Imagine the stories they'd tell about battling frigid winds and deep snow drifts on their Norfolk County farms. Their resilience is an inspiration—and a reminder of how fortunate we are today.

Speaking of winter, how many of us remember the excitement of waking up to the season's first snowfall? The joy of hearing school closures announced on the radio, followed by the thrill of dashing outside to play in the freshly fallen snow, is a memory many of us cherish. I can still recall watching my dogs romp through the yard, their warm breath visible in the frosty air. Those moments of simple joy always seemed to end the same way—rushing back indoors to the cozy warmth of home.

Winter also brings the solstice, marking the time when the earth's axis tilts furthest from the sun. In the northern hemisphere, especially in our area, this means the sun sits low in the sky, and the cold becomes our

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Calendar of Events

February 2025
NCHSC Board Meeting via ZOOM
11 Feb 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
16 Feb 2:00pm

Closed
17 Feb

March 2025

April 2025
NCHSC Annual Membership Luncheon
5 Apr 11am - 3pm

Closed
Apr 20

May 2025
Closed
11 May

NCHSC Board Meeting via ZOOM
13 May 7:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
18 May 2:00pm

Closed
26 May



President's Message, *Continued*

constant companion. But even in the frostiest weather, the warmth of community and shared history keeps us connected.

As we welcome 2025, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you. Thank you for your unwavering support and for being part of our NCHSC family. Together, we preserve the rich stories of our past while creating new memories for the future.

Wishing you all a Happy New Year filled with joy, health, and success!

With appreciation,
Robert B. Hitchings
President, Norfolk County Historical Society

Jessica Cosmas to Speak at February Membership Meeting

Please join us for our February membership meeting at the Chesapeake Central Library on February 16, 2025, at 2:00 pm. We are pleased to welcome Jessica Cosmas, Historical Services Manager for the City of Chesapeake Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, as our guest speaker. Jessica will discuss how public education efforts in Virginia changed with the American Civil War. The Freedman's Bureau, and later Rosenwald Schools, provided new opportunities for African Americans. Jessica describes how the Cornland School relates to these historic programs. She provides behind-the-scenes insight into the one-room schoolhouse and offers a glimpse into the Cornland School's future.



Jessica Cosmas,
Historical Services Manager,
Chesapeake Dept of PRT

Jessica Cosmas is originally from Birmingham, Alabama. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in History of Art from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. She has had the good fortune to work at a variety of galleries and museums across the United States. She also holds a Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies from Harvard Extension School. Jessica started working for the City of Chesapeake, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT) in 2021. As the Historical Services Manager of PRT, she has supervised the rehabilitation of the Cornland School into a public museum.

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

Boaters from Australia Visit the Wallace History Room

By Allison Termine,
NCHSC Board Member & Wallace Room Volunteer



Philip Shand & Lesley Day,
Our World-Traveling Visitors
from Tasmania

Recent visitors to the Wallace History Room were an interesting couple from Tasmania, Australia. Remarkably, Philip Shand and Lesley Day, have been traveling for nine years, on their sailboat, PACIFIQUE. On their website, they share: "We are a couple in our 60s and left Australia in 2015 in our 44ft Adams Carina. We are currently sailing the east coast of North America and intend to cross the Pacific in 2025." To date, they have visited 38 countries on their journey.

Philip and Lesley entered the USA via Canada, arriving in Maine, and have been heading south. They recently docked in the canal at Great Bridge, seeking warmer weather. We were delighted by their visit and their interest in Chesapeake history.

During their visit, Philip and Lesley wanted to familiarize themselves with the history of Chesapeake before visiting the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Museum. They are both passionate about the history of waterways. The NCHSC volunteers gladly shared old maps of the waterways from our archives and they were able to compare historical maps of Great Bridge with current maps to locate the exact site of the Battle of Great Bridge.

Reminder to Protect Your Family History

By Frances Griffin,
NCHSC Board Member

Today, I am thinking about the people of Ashville, North Carolina, who were severely impacted by Hurricane Helene. This powerful storm tore through parts of North Carolina and Virginia like a freight train, leaving widespread devastation in its wake. Many lives were tragically lost, countless individuals were left homeless, and irreplaceable possessions, such as family Bibles and photographs, were destroyed. This catastrophic event occurred just four months ago, leaving the community grappling with the aftermath.

The people of Ashville have endured tremendous suffering, due to flooding in the mountainous terrain. The last storm of comparable magnitude to hit the area was in 1916. Hurricane Helene is now recognized as one of the deadliest storms to strike the U.S. mainland in decades. While hurricanes are not uncommon, the scale of devastation and loss caused by Helene is unprecedented.

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I recall the impact of Hurricane Isabel in September 2003. That storm brought heavy rain, fallen trees, widespread flooding, and power outages that lasted for two weeks in some areas. While Isabel caused significant damage, it paled in comparison to the destruction left by Hurricane Helene. At the time of Isabel, I was living on Butts Station Road in Chesapeake. Our losses included roof damage, broken tree limbs, shattered windows, and the destruction of a well-built wooden shed used for storage. Inside that shed, I had placed two tote bags filled with old books and precious photographs, assuming they would be safe.

In August 2003, before Hurricane Isabel struck, I had a conversation with Robert Hitchings, who was at that time, the archivist and historian at the Sargeant Memorial Room at Kirn Library in downtown Norfolk. I mentioned my collection of old photographs, and he suggested scanning them for the Sargeant Memorial Collection. Following his advice, I allowed him to copy and scan some of my treasured photographs, including two from around 1885 that depicted my great-grandparents' farm—then known as the Coleman Farm and later renamed Coleman Place after being annexed into the city of Norfolk.

When Hurricane Isabel struck, many of my photographs were damaged by water, and I lost several rare books. However, thanks to Robert's foresight, the scanned images of my Coleman Farm photographs were preserved. These backups have become invaluable, serving as a reminder of the importance of protecting family history.

The people of Ashville, North Carolina, were not as fortunate. They lost everything—family members, neighbors, homes, cars, belongings, and precious photographs. Their grief underscores the necessity of preparing for disasters and preserving what we hold dear.

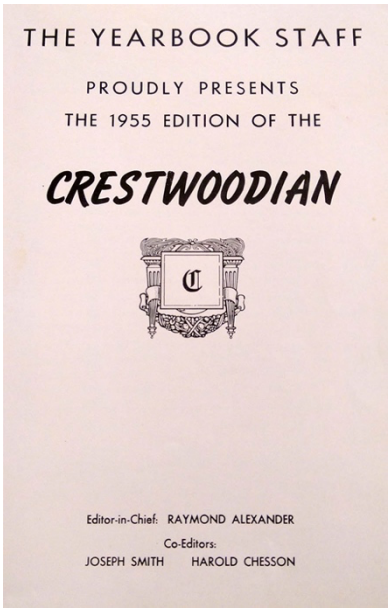
I urge everyone to create a backup plan for their rare photographs and documents before disaster strikes. Scanning and digitally storing these items can save cherished memories from being lost forever. Label photographs with the names of loved ones, locations, and dates to ensure their stories endure for future generations. Additionally, as I discovered, websites like Abebooks.com can help assess the value of rare books, which may assist with insurance claims.

Hurricanes are a deadly force of nature, but with preparation, we can mitigate the loss of priceless items and memories. To the people of North Carolina, my thoughts and prayers are with you as you rebuild your lives and communities. And to Robert Hitchings—thank you for helping me preserve the family farm's legacy.

The volunteers in the Wallace Memorial History Room can help you scan and copy your family photos, family trees, and family bible. Contact us to find out how to get started today!

Crestwood High Alumni Association Donates Materials to Wallace Memorial History Room

The Wallace Room received a generous offer from Inez Randolph, Vice President of the Crestwood High School Alumni Association, Inc., allowing us to digitize their collection of Crestwood High School materials from 1947 through 1971, including yearbooks from 1955 to 1971. Our volunteers scanned the materials to add them to the Wallace Room collection.



Title Page from Crestwood High School's First Yearbook

Crestwood's first graduating class was the Class of 1955. Although the school's history was a brief 18 years, its legacy lives on in the accomplishments of the many students who graduated to become scientists, lawyers and judges, doctors, entertainers, artists, professional athletes, CEOs and entrepreneurs, college professors and teachers, administrators and superintendents, fire fighters and policemen, community leaders, legislators, and respected members of the military. The Crestwood High School Alumni Association was established in 2018 to preserve the history of the school, educate the public about the accomplishments of its students, and focus on "…assisting students wherever our graduates live."

Contact the Wallace Room if you are interested in viewing this collection.

February of 1835

By Robert Hitchings,
NCHSC President and Archivist/Historian

While none of us can recall the harsh winter of 1835 firsthand, historical records paint a vivid picture of its severity. According to the *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, February 9th and 11th of that year were particularly frigid. Here's how the editor described those days:

February 9th, 1835

"February 9th 1835, cold weather is returning. A warm south wind which blew up on a Friday had some progress in melting the snow that fell on Tuesday, but at 2 PM on Saturday morning, it shifted to the opposite point of the compass and came out uncommonly cold. It has since veered round to the westward, blowing quite fresh, until last evening when it lulled, and cold somewhat shifted. The weather yesterday morning was colder than it has ever been within our recollection, with the single exception of the bitter cold day, the 25th of January, 1821 when the thermometer at 8AM was 3 degrees above zero. Yesterday morning, at half past 8, in the open air, but in a shelter situation, it stood at 4 degrees. At day break, in a more exposed situation it must have been as low as zero. In our last week we spoke of the uncommon coldness of the weather on Saturday and Sunday, on Monday morning the harbor was frozen over to the thickness of 2 inches and the steam ferry boat was more than two hours opening a passage across the river to Portsmouth. The steam boat Columbus postponed her departure for Baltimore and on Monday she still remains here."

Deep Creek Mennonite Cemetery

By Suzy Ward Fleming,
NCHSC Board Member & Volunteer

On November 19, 2024, Kay Ziegler and I were excited to find a small church cemetery at 1001 West Road. The property was owned by Deep Creek Mennonite Church from 1937 until 2000, when it was purchased by Calvary Community Church. The building is currently operating as Bridge Builders Community Church Center.

Behind the building we found 4 stones with 6 names on them. The oldest stone is for Gertrude Yoder born and died on August 26, 1954. The next is little Fern Yvonne Layman who was born in 1957 and died in 1958. Fern is on a stone with her sister Esther Arlene born and died in 1961. Fern's death certificate states she died from an auto accident in a driveway. Through research we found the girl's parents, Amos and Rebecca Warfel Layman, were buried in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.



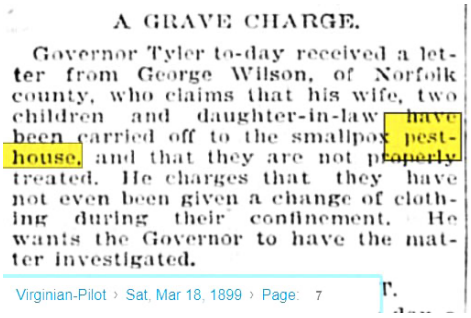
Gravestones at the Deep Creek Mennonite Church Cemetery

The last two stones are for adults, Ira Milton Zook 1873-1964 on the same stone with his wife Susanna (Susie) Hershberger Zook 1873-1953 and Roy Philip Payne 1929-1992.

It is always interesting to research the cemeteries that we uncover, and the Wallace Room is an excellent place to start this research.

A Grave Charge

In early 1899, Norfolk County residents were grappling with a dreaded smallpox outbreak. And although pest houses were set up to quarantine and care for those infected with the disease, care and treatment practices were regularly criticized as seen in this short article about the family of Mr. George Wilson of Norfolk County.


A GRAVE CHARGE.

Governor Tyler to-day received a letter from George Wilson, of Norfolk county, who claims that his wife, two children and daughter-in-law have been carried off to the smallpox pest-house, and that they are not properly treated. He charges that they have not even been given a change of clothing during their confinement. He wants the Governor to have the matter investigated.

Virginian-Pilot › Sat, Mar 18, 1899 › Page: 7

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

Post-WWII Communities Offered a Slice of the American Dream

By P. S. Vredenburg,
NCHSC Board Member & Volunteer

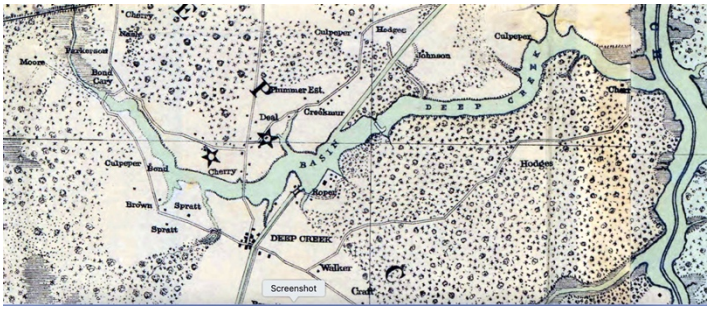


A chance discovery of some ads in a 1963 newspaper by Suzy Ward Fleming prompted a question among several volunteers. Why were all these communities cropping up in Norfolk County?

After World War II, Norfolk County anticipated the need for housing for the area's growing military industrial complex in Norfolk and Portsmouth. Shipyard workers, military personnel, and civil service workers needed homes and Norfolk County needed new tax-payers.

Areas like Deep Creek and Western Branch offered acres of farmland that were ripe for development into communities that could attract homebuyers who wanted good jobs but also dreamed of "country living." So, by the summer of 1962, neighborhoods were popping up all over what would soon become the City of Chesapeake. Newspapers advertised developments along George Washington Highway, providing access to Portsmouth and Norfolk military installations.

These communities offered affordable, 3-bedroom brick homes with plastered walls and attached garages. Some boasted city water and sewerage, and paved roads. But Plummer Plantation in the heart of Deep Creek, offered hardwood floors, fully electric kitchens, proximity to local schools, and best of all -- waterfront living! Imagine, fishing in your own back yard!



Plummer Estate on 1887 Norfolk County Map

Wedgewood Development Co. bought the Plummer family farm, began development in 1958, and named the community Plummer Plantation. According to Hiram Franklin Plummer's 1932 obituary, the family had lived on the property since "early colonial days." We found the Plummer Estate on our 1887 Norfolk County Map in the Wallace Room. Through more research, we also found that Hiram's great-grandfather, William Plummer testified in his 1813 will that he had bought the land from Arthur Cherry and was bequeathing it to his son Daniel Plummer.

Development continued in phases at Plummer Plantation and sales remained brisk well into the late 1960s, offering potential homeowners a little slice of the American dream.

Annual Membership Luncheon Scheduled for April 5, 2025

Mark your calendars! The NCHSC annual membership luncheon will be held on April 5, 2025, from 11:00am to 3:00pm at the Garrett Plantation House on George Washington Hwy South. Our guest speaker will be Mr. Steven Forrest, Historian for Fort Norfolk and Board Member of the Norfolk Historical Society. Mr. Forrest has been sharing the history of Fort Norfolk as historian/docent for more than 25 years, including the story of the Battle of Craney Island on June 22, 1813. Look for more details in your email!

2024 Events

Our final two events for 2024 included our History, Mystery, Mayhem & Murder cemetery tours during the first weekend in November and the Battle of Great Bridge Reenactment and Festival in December. Here are a few photos from Suzy Ward Fleming and Lori Pickett. We had a great 2024 and we are looking forward to an even better 2025!

