



# The Historian

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia

Winter February 2020 Volume 25, Issue 1

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2020!

As your President I wish each and every one of you a Happy New Year! May 2020 be an *Annus Mirabilis*, or wonderful year like last year.

We can look back with pride as our Wallace History Room grew, not only adding books, pictures, school yearbooks, maps, etc., but with many family genealogies as well. This is the core of our historical society, and I am sure our past members who started our society are beaming with delight. As your president, I can assure you that we continue to grow and are doing quite well.

I had a recent interesting experience representing the NCHSC as its archivist/historian. Last fall Mr. Jerry Gagnon and his daughter, Tiffney, came by the Wallace History Room and told us of their recent backyard discovery -- a large, 10-inch-diameter cannonball. They found the cannonball in the small tributary behind their home off of Oaklette Drive. They wished to donate it to our history room, but I suggested that the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Museum would be the best place for this old cannonball. With the help of James Whetstone, a young volunteer and son of NCHSC board member, Thomas Whetstone, we delivered this heavy, revolutionary cannonball to the museum. I wish you could have seen the expressions on their faces, it was something to see!

We have had some fantastic programs throughout the years, but nothing like our Christmas program with Ben Franklin, portrayed by Mr. B. J. Pryor, who visited us all the way from Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. He was a delight and what a turnout we had! Everyone enjoyed the program, and so many were anxious to have their picture taken with old Ben.

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## Calendar of Events

### February 2020

NCHSC Board Meeting  
11 Feb 6:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting  
16 Feb 2:00pm

Closed  
17 Feb

### March 2020

Closed  
13 Mar

### April 2020

Closed  
12 Apr

### May 2020

NCHSC Board Meeting  
12 May 6:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting  
17 May 2:00pm



## President's Letter, *Cont'd*

For our February membership meeting and as part of African American History Month, we are partnering with the Chesapeake Central Library to provide a compelling program. Our special guest speaker, Mr. Ken Woodley, will speak on his new book, *The Road to Healing*, about the history of school segregation in Prince Edward County, Virginia. Mr. Woodley will also be selling his books. We look forward to seeing you there.

As with any organization, participation is vital. I encourage all of you to help us keep our local history alive. If you have photographs, genealogies, or other Norfolk County memorabilia, we welcome you to share them with us. Those special keepsakes will also become keepsakes of the Wallace Memorial History Room and add to our ever-growing collection. Happy New Year 2020!

Robert B. Hitchings, President  
Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, VA

## Wallace Room to Display Recently Donated Antique Valentine Collection

By Robert Hitchings,  
NCHSC President and Archivist/Historian



Laverne Miller  
1915-1924

From February 12 to March 10, the Wallace Memorial History Room will have a small exhibit of early 1900s Valentines. Last year we were gifted an old wooden box full of Valentines that had belonged to a little girl who lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The young girl's name was Laverne Miller, the only child of Walter and Hildegard Miller.

Laverne was born on July 14, 1915 and died of Diphtheria on May 5, 1924. Her mother had saved everything of Laverne's, and somehow this box ended up in an antique auction about 40 years ago. The box was purchased by Mrs. Sandra Wright Justiss of Moyock, NC, who has now gifted the lovely box of Valentines to the Wallace Room in tribute to a little girl named Laverne.



## Recent Acquisitions to the Wallace Memorial History Room

By Kay Ziegler,  
NCHSC Board Member, Wallace Room Manager

We wish to thank our members and patrons for our most recent acquisitions to the Wallace Room. Although there are too many to list, we would like to thank NCHSC member, Sparky Roberts for his gift of World War I photographs and memorabilia, as well as memorabilia related to the Suffolk Grays. Mrs. Shelly Winslow donated newspaper clippings on the old Omohundro House, and Mr. Bower Patrick donated 94 books. Mr. Brantly Walker donated two WWI panoramic photographs of Norfolk from 1919, and Mr. Edward Nelson Voke donated 45 books. Mr. James Jennings donated 16 items related to the Chrysler Museum. Mr. Thomas Whetstone donated a two-volume set of *The Life of Brigadier General William Woodford of the American Revolution 1734-1780* by Catesby Willis Stewart. We also received two copies of *Captain Charles Fordyce, 14<sup>th</sup> Foot* written and donated by Mr. Roy Randolph. We would also like to thank Mr. Clyde Colbert for his generous donation of a Minolta Microfilm reader.

## Photo Album: 2019 Annual Dinner – “Christmas with Benjamin Franklin”



## Sunset Lake Park

By Kay Ziegler,  
NCHSC Board Member, Wallace Room Manager

We have had different patrons come to the Wallace Room asking if we know anything about Sunset Lake Amusement Park. I knew nothing of the park since I am a transplant from Pennsylvania, but to local people and volunteer, Jean Spencer who had lived in Deep Creek during the late 50s and 60s, Sunset Park was a name they all knew. Jean told me she was able to sit outside her home and hear the music and entertainment at the park; however, no one knew much about the history, so it was time to do a little research.

In the June 18, 1955 issue of *Norfolk Journal and Guide* newspaper, I found an article that stated the park opened on June 16. It was to be a "modern amusement center with a swimming pool, to be located on the banks of the Dismal Swamp Canal in Deep Creek." In the words of realty agent, Floyd Cooper, the park was designed to give "colored" people in the Tidewater area a "good clean place to come to get away from the city." The 6-acre center was to contain a one-story dance and dining hall with a modern kitchen, an adult swimming pool and a wading pool, plus a midway amusement show and other activities.

In my research, I found ads advertising Sunset Lake Park as the "Perfect Spot for Picnics, and Outings." The park was open every day and every night. Churches, clubs, and organizations were invited to bring their outings to Sunset Lake Park. One ad for July 4, 1956 advertised "Special Attraction, Harness Racing". At the end of July 1957, the Deep Creek area was flooded with people going to Sunset Lake to see Chuck Willis and Roy Gaines and his Orchestra. They estimated a crowd of 5,000 to 7,500 people in attendance and according to Mr. Cooper, "Despite all that crowd, order was perfect." Ray Charles was coming on August 1, and they wondered how big the crowd would be for him. In 1958 from October 31 to November 8, Sunset Lake hosted the First Annual Hampton Roads Agricultural Fair to include exhibits, awards, car races and more. By May 1959, a Drive-In Theatre was added and on opening night an added attraction was Lloyd Price and his Orchestra for \$.99 a ticket. In August 1959 Sunset Lake was 5 years old and had a big celebration planned. Entertainment during the week would include Bill Doggett and his recording orchestra, as well as The Platters, Jimmy Bond and The Stereos, The Giblartars and The Cameos. Justine "Baby" Washington with Chuck Berry concluded the festivities. The list of entertainers goes on. In August 1960, entertainment included Bullmoose Jackson, Jimmie Reed, The 5 Satins, The Isley Brothers, Larry Williams, and A. Neville.



Advertisement for Sunset Lake Park from  
September 7, 1959 issue of the  
*Norfolk Journal and Guide*

I can see why Jean Spencer only had to sit outside her house to be entertained. Sunset Lake Park was a place to make many memories. If you have any information, memorabilia, or photos of Sunset Lake, please consider sharing them with our Wallace History Room.



## 2020 Genealogy Events

By Amy Williamson Jonak,  
Wallace Room Volunteer

Want to “do” your family history this year? Get started--or get back in the groove--with one of these classes or events.

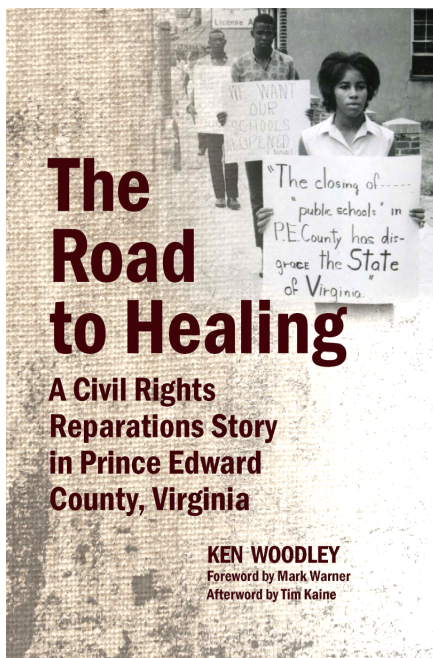
- Feb 12, Wed. **Transcribe-a-thon**, volunteer opportunity at the Library of Virginia (LVA), Richmond  
Help make 400 years of Virginia history more accessible as you read written pages and type them into digital form. Minimum age is 16 (12 with an adult). See details at <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/news/calendar/> . Other dates include Feb. 29, Mar 11 & 28, Apr 8 & 25, May 13 & 30.
- March 7, Sat. **Map Genealogy Workshop**, 9:30am-12:30pm, LVA, Richmond  
Join senior map archivist Cassandra Farrell as she discusses the different types of maps that are helpful in genealogical research. \$25 fee. Details at <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/news/calendar/>
- March 13, Fri. **Irish Ancestry Workshop**, 9:30am-12:30pm, LVA, Richmond  
Fintan Mullan and Gillian Hunt with the Ulster Historical Foundation will conduct a workshop about Irish and Scots-Irish research. \$25 fee. Details at <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/news/calendar/> .
- April 10, Fri. **Beginner Genealogy Workshop**, 9:30am-12:30pm, LVA, Richmond  
Join Library of Virginia archivists to learn about basic research strategies, useful websites and helpful resources found at LVA. \$25 fee. Details at <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/news/calendar/> .
- April 18, Sat. **Virginia Genealogical Society Spring 2020 Conference**, LVA, Richmond  
Spend the day with Anne Gillespie Mitchell as she shares her knowledge of Ancestry research strategies. Fee required. See details at <https://vgs.org/> .
- May 8, Fri. **Intermediate Genealogy Workshop**, 9:30am-12:30pm, LVA, Richmond  
Library archivists and a reference librarian introduce you to the types of records in the Library’s collections to help you get started with your Virginia-based research. \$25 fee. Details at <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/news/calendar/> .
- May 20-23 **2020 National Genealogical Society Family History Conference**, Salt Lake City, Utah  
This is the granddaddy of genealogy gatherings. Fee required. See details at <https://conference.ngsgenealogy.org/> .

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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) \_\_\_\_\_

**Journalist and Author Ken Woodley, Our Guest Speaker for February Membership Meeting**



In partnership with the Chesapeake Central Library, we welcome journalist Ken Woodley, former editor of *The Farmville Herald*. Mr. Woodley will discuss his book, *The Road to Healing*, recounting his successful fight to achieve reparation on behalf of African American children denied an education in Prince Edward County, Virginia. Led by the editorials of *The Farmville Herald*, the school system chose “to lock classrooms rather than integrate them.” From 1959 to 1964, white children attended private academies, but the school system made no such accommodations for African American children. Mr. Woodley’s book centers on his 18-month effort to establish reparation, finally realized in 2004 in the form of state-funded scholarships for African American students.

Join us at the Chesapeake Central Library on February 16th at 2:00 p.m. to hear Mr. Woodley’s story. Mr. Woodley will have books on hand for sale. Light refreshments will be served. Come and support the NCHSC with your presence and bring a friend!