

The Messenger

OF THE CHESTERFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

MISSION: TO COLLECT, PRESERVE, INTERPRET AND PROMOTE THE COUNTY'S PAST FOR
THE EDUCATION AND ENJOYMENT OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Number 152

January 2025

A Letter From President Jerry Netherland

In 2024, the Historical Society, the County, and community members celebrated and commemorated the 275th Anniversary of the creation and Charter of Chesterfield County. In 1749, Chesterfield County was established out of Henrico County. One of the main reasons behind the formation was the need for a local courthouse so citizens could conduct business locally instead of having to cross over the James River and travel down to the small village of Varina where the Henrico County Courthouse was at the time.

The re-discovery of the Chesterfield County Charter after being missing for decades is an amazing story. I wish to express sincere thanks to Liess Van Der Linden-Brusse and Buddy Cranford for their persistence in tracking down the County Charter once again, telling its story, and ensuring it will be preserved for all future generations to enjoy. On Sunday, October 27, 2024, Liess showcased the Charter once again (having done so on numerous occasions during 2024) at the Quarterly Membership meeting of the Society in front of the re-constructed 1749 Courthouse which houses the County Museum.

The work done by the Quarterly meeting committee to put on the program was very much appreciated! Another highlight of the Quarterly meeting, the new display, "Chesterfield County Railroads: From Mule Power to Steam Power," opened in the County Museum that weekend. I want to express my sincere appreciation to David Limmer, Pat Roble, Lex Krauchunas and

many other contributors, too numerous to name here, for the wonderful new display. I encourage Society members to stop by and see this unique display featuring artifacts, photographs, documents and stories from the heyday of Chesterfield County railroads. Did you know that the 1749 Courthouse bell is preserved and in the Museum? And that you can hear a recording of it? Come into the Museum and check them out.

We had a very busy 2024, and the Board of Directors, the Committees and Executive Director, Dianne Mallory, are hard at work putting final touches on upcoming items for 2025. I want to emphasize the Winter Lecture Series starting on Friday, January 10, 2025. We have a great line-up of presenters, so put these on your calendar! Hope to see you there!

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WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Thank you for joining the Historical Society!

Linda Cheives
Edward Coble
Mary Beth Cox
Thomas Kormylo
Valarie Melville

Richard Moss
James and Kelsy Myers
Roni Pitt
Jay Thornton
Sue Williams

THANK YOU, DONORS!

Up to \$99
The Kroger Company
Joan Mallory-Smith

\$100 to \$499
Douglas & Linda Blake
John & Lilian Mullane
Liess van der Linden-Brusse
Cleola Wilkerson

\$500 to \$2500
Anonymous
Robyn Bason-Peake

LIBRARY DONATIONS AND ACQUISITIONS

Liess van der Linden-Brusse

The research library in historic Trinity Church welcomes donations of old books and photos, maps and manuscripts, magazine and newspaper clippings, yearbooks, programs and flyers, journals and diaries, and research notes on Chesterfield families, places and events. Please keep the library in mind as you clear out your attics and basements. The library is open Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm. The phone number is (804) 796-7152. Thank you!

The following items have recently been added to our Library Collection:

Genealogy

CURTIS Family – Articles, obituaries, family history and photos of A.T. Curtis (1866-1953) and his son P.T. Curtis, Sr. (1893-1966); gift of Dale Patrick Brown

HILL Family – Deeds and Wills from Chesterfield County, VA Courthouse and from Cumberland County, KY Courthouse (1758-1824); gift of Margaret Gagliari (CHSV Genealogy Library Collection)

HOWLETT Family – Inventory of the estate of Thomas A. Howlett listing 148 named enslaved individuals. Library of VA. Purchased (Manuscript Collection)

1787 CENSUS – Chesterfield County, VA, by Netti Schreiner-Yantis & Florence S. Love; received from the CHSV Genealogy Library 16, 1851

General Interest

Murder in Midlothian, the True and Complete Account of the Murder of Anthony T. Robiou, July 16,

1851, in Midlothian, VA, by Brandon Fullam (Second Edition); gift of the author

Curtis General Store in Chester, VA, original General Ledger and Wholesale Ledger (1920s-1930s); gift of Dale Patrick Brown (Rare Books Collection)
Ocher Post Office, Chesterfield County, VA, postcard addressed to Miss Willie E. Evans. Purchased. (Manuscript Collection)

Photograph Collection

Churches, Piney Grove (2016) – Exterior view & Highway Marker, color; gift of Pat Barron
Cobbs Cemetery (2016) – Gravestones/Monument, Bolling & Robertson Families, color; gift of Pat Barron
Houses, Magnolia Grange (1918) – Exterior front view, b/w; gift of Philip Daffron
Memorial Day Ceremony (2021) – CD with 483 photos; gift of Cris Watson
Memorial Day Ceremony (2023) – CD with 667 photos; gift of Cris Watson

Continued on page 4

Museums, Chesterfield County Museum (1976) – Groundbreaking ceremony, b/w
Schools, Haley Cole’s Free School (1991) – Exterior view, color; gift of Doris Hancock
Schools, Thomas Dale Class of 1968 (2018) – 50th Reunion, color & b/w
Veterans Day Ceremony (2019) – CD with 482 photos; gift of Cris Watson
Weatherford, John, Grave Site (2007) – Baptist Preacher’s grave near Shockoe Baptist Church, Chatham, VA; gift of Jim Ray Haney

The following photographs were printed from slides discovered in Castlewood office in 2013:

Bellona Arsenal (1984) – Wall with four cannons, color
Churches, Wood’s Church (1986) – Exterior view with historic interpreters, color

Houses, Halfway House (1984) – Exterior view, color
Houses, Magnolia Grange (1998) – Exterior front view, color
Houses, Wrexham (1978) – Exterior view, color
Libraries, Chester Log Cabin (1984) – Exterior view, color
Military Sites & Structures, Drewry’s Bluff with cannon (1984), color
Military Sites & Structures, Drewry’s Bluff battle (1862) – Drawing, b/w
Military Sites & Structures, Point of Rocks (1865) – Union officers & African-American troops, b/w
Museums, Chesterfield County Museum (1993) – Exterior with millstone, color
Railroads, Gravity Train (undated) – Illustration, color

MEMBERSHIP REMINDERS

CHSV is asking for your assistance in updating the **Veterans of Chesterfield County** database of all county veterans from the Colonial Wars to the present day. Intended as a memorial to those who served their country, this database will be made available to researchers who visit the Society library, and in time, provided online. If you have information that can help, please email admin@chesterfieldhistory.com (please put “County Veteran” in the subject line), or call the Society’s office at 804-796-7121.

Thank you to everyone who renewed a membership. Thank you for your continuing support!

BOARD NEWS

The October 2024 CHSV Quarterly Meeting was held on a glorious weather day outside on the historic greens of the Chesterfield County Museum and 1892 Old Jail, located in the Chesterfield Government complex. The theme of this meeting was the commemoration of the 275th Anniversary of the founding of Chesterfield County, Virginia on May 12, 1749, granted by the authority of Virginia Governor William Gooch.

The featured speaker was Liess van der Linden-Brusse, Library Committee Chair, Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia. Ms. Linden-Brusse shared the saga of the "1749 Commission of Peace," the County's oldest written artifact.

Liess enlightened attendees with more of a detective story from when the document first went missing during the Civil War to its being put under lock and key in the Circuit Court, where it remains today.

Meeting attendees were invited to visit the Chesterfield County Museum, opened for the meeting, to see the new exhibit, "Chesterfield County Railroads: From Mule Power to Steam Power." The 1892 Old Jail was also opened, and visitors viewed the original iron-barred cells with their metal bunks still in place along with the graffiti of long-gone jail inmates.



The next quarterly meeting will be on January 26, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. at the Historic Castlewood House.

Bob Talbot, Vice President, CHSV Board of Directors

The next **Regular Board** meeting will be held on **Monday, January 13th** at 5:30 p.m. Please check the website for the location: www.chesterfieldhistory.com.

The next **Quarterly** meeting will be held on **Sunday, January 26th** at 2 p.m. It will be held at the Historic Castlewood House. See the enclosed flyer.

The **Annual Meeting** will be held on **Sunday, July 27, 2025**. Please check the website for the location: www.chesterfieldhistory.com.

Regular Board Meetings are held on Mondays.

Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Location: please check the website:

www.chesterfieldhistory.com

Scheduled Dates:

January 13

March 10

May 12

July 14

September 8

November 10

Quarterly Meetings are held on Sundays.

Time: 2:00 p.m.

Location: please check the website:

www.chesterfieldhistory.com

Scheduled Dates:

January 26, at the Historic Castlewood House

April 27

October 26

CALENDAR of EVENTS

Unless otherwise noted, all events are free. However, *registration is required for events with an asterisk (*)*. To register, call 804-748-1623 or visit <https://www.chesterfield.gov/150/Parks-and-Recreation>. Events with a registration requirement may be canceled if there are not enough registrants.

LOCATIONS OF EVENTS

Trinity Church
10111 Iron Bridge Road
Chester, VA 23832
(804) 796-7121

Magnolia Grange House Museum
10020 Iron Bridge Road
Chesterfield, VA 23832
(804) 748-1498

Chesterfield County Museum
6813 Mimms Loop
Chesterfield, VA 23832
(804) 768-731

FIRST SATURDAY of the MONTH

Genealogy Roundtable from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
Bring your pedigree chart or come and talk about how to solve your genealogical "brick wall."
Location: Trinity Church

early 20th centuries. Some were crafty and devious, others blunt and violent, but no two were quite the same. Learn all about the interesting history of jail escapes in this lecture by the Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia's Angela Bullock.
Location: Chesterfield County Museum*

JANUARY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25th – 11 a.m.

Yarn Doll Day*

Learn how to make an old-fashioned yarn doll (and take it home) during this craft workshop. See dolls handmade from corn husks, corn cobs, nuts, pine tags, wooden spools, and paper. All ages are welcome.

Location: Chesterfield County Museum*

APRIL

SATURDAY, APRIL 26th – 11 a.m.

Chesterfield's Historic Courthouse Green Tour*

During an outdoor walking tour of Chesterfield's Historic Courthouse Green, learn about the historic buildings and monuments, as well as the 210-year-old Nunnally Oak Tree. After the tour, participants are welcome to further explore the history of Chesterfield County at the County Museum and the Old Jail.

Location: Chesterfield County Museum*

FEBRUARY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22nd – 11 a.m.

Compacency Is an Issue: Let's DO Something! *

This lecture, presented by Chesterfield Historical Society's African-American History Committee, will focus on youth in our communities. Efforts made by past and present community leaders to promote the well-being of our youth will be highlighted, as we examine possible solutions to current challenges our youth face.

Location: Chesterfield County Museum*

MAY

SATURDAY, MAY 3RD – 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Chesterfield Historical Society Plant and Bake Sale

This annual event which will benefit the historic Point of Rocks Park will be held rain or shine. Details will be forthcoming on the Society's website and in the April edition of The Messenger.
Location: Historic Castlewood

MARCH

SATURDAY, MARCH 22nd – 11 a.m.

"He's getting away!": Jailbreaks in Chesterfield County*
Chesterfield County has had many jailbreaks during the 19th and

***Registration is required.** Register at [chesterfield.gov/parks](https://www.chesterfield.gov/parks) or call 804-748-1623. For details, call the County Museum at 804-768-7311.

EXHIBITS

Discover the history of Chesterfield County's railroads in the 19th century. Visit the Chesterfield County Museum and check out *Chesterfield County Railroads: From Mule Power to Steam Power*. This temporary exhibit includes displays of railroad artifacts, photos, and stories from the heyday of Chesterfield railroads.

Be sure to visit the County's Parks and Recreation website to learn about other programming and events:
www.chesterfield.gov.

A LOOK BACK AT...

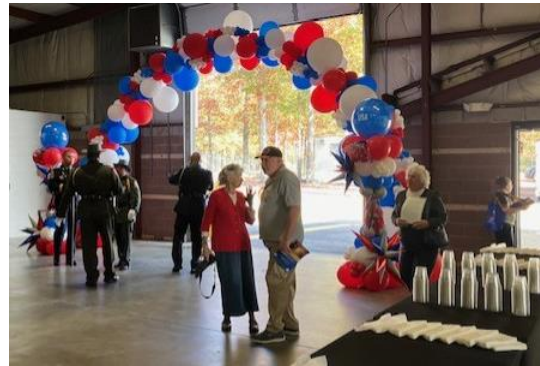
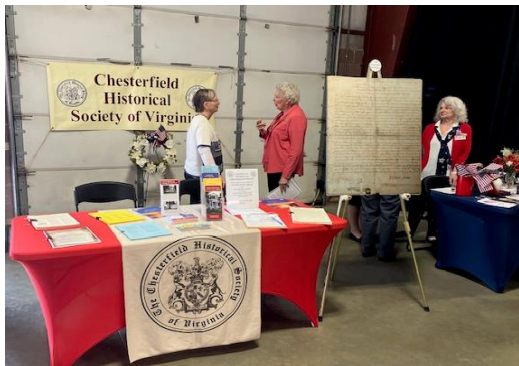
The Chesterfield County 2024 Veterans Day Program, November 11

The theme of this year's program revolved around the history of military music and the importance of music for all service branches of the United States. Andrew Freiden, of the local NBC affiliate WWBT, officiated the program.

The Bonefire Trombone Ensemble, the Thomas Dale High School Symphonic Band, and the Huguenot High School JROTC performed a selection of military songs including *Off We Go Into the Wild Blue Yonder* and *Anchors Aweigh*.

Ruth Snead, longtime CHSV volunteer, was presented with the Community Service Award by the Daughters of the American Revolution in recognition of her accomplishments in historical preservation and event planning.

The Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia maintains a specialized database of Chesterfield residents who are U.S. military service veterans. This community-wide program provided an opportunity to continue to gather more of that important data.



A LOOK BACK AT...

The Chesterfield County 2024 Model Government Day, November 12-13.

Each year, Chesterfield County Public Schools and the Community Engagement & Resources Office host the Model County Government (MCG) program to provide high-school government students an opportunity to experience a firsthand look at local government through direct participation by shadowing local government leaders.

Chloe N. Carter, Chesterfield County Community Engagement Coordinator-Youth, stated that the County "hosted 66 students from all 11 high schools in Chesterfield County and 32 County departments participated in the shadow experience. We also had teachers, sponsors and county leaders attend."

The Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia, while not a County department, was invited to participate when they received a request from Amelia Amerson, CHSV high school volunteer, to learn about historical archiving and other related topics. Amelia shadowed Dianne Mallory, CHSV Executive Director, for the day. Martha Atkinson and Paula Rabinowitz provided a tour of the Magnolia Grange House and Museum (MGHM) and an introduction to the use of period historical furnishings and artifacts used at Magnolia Grange. Amelia is a senior at Matoaca High School; she credits her grandfather for instilling her with a passion for history.

Pictured from left to right are Paula Rabinowitz, MGHM volunteer; Martha Atkinson, MGHM curator; Dianne Mallory, CHSV Executive Director; Amelia Amerson.



Out on a Limb

Angie Wilderman

Genealogy is forever changing; almost every day a new record set becomes available. Then the question arises, “What is the best way to use the new database?” Genealogists need to stay on top of their game. Try to learn something new as frequently as possible. Take in a webinar. Check this free site weekly and register for a webinar:

<https://familytreewebinars.com/upcoming-webinars/>.

The webinars are generally free for a week. GRIVA also has free zoom meetings: <https://griva.org/>. Check out their upcoming events or the DNA or German SIGS. Join our Genealogy Roundtable on the first Saturday of each month from 1-3PM to meet other genealogists, discuss your brick walls, contribute something new you have found, or visit the genealogy library. At the roundtable held in November, we discussed organizing your genealogy paper files and digital files.

We are adding books from other states and other Virginia counties to the Genealogy Library. Visit our Genealogy Webpage and check the link:

<https://chesterfieldhistory.com/files/Genealogy-Library-Titles.pdf>. Check the book titles that are available. The file is searchable. Come visit and see if we have a book on your ancestor’s home state and county. Was your ancestor in the Revolutionary War or Civil War? We have quite a number of books on those topics including rosters as well.

Austin Spears - Postmaster of Hallsboro

Buddy Cranford

Austin Spears was the owner of Hallsborough (Hallsboro) Tavern, located in Chesterfield County, VA. He was the son of Chesterfield County Militia Private John Spears who was born on February 12, 1759, in Chesterfield County. John Spears served in the 5th Virginia Regiment (Chesterfield County Militia). A marriage bond dated April 9, 1804, issued in Chesterfield County to John Spears and Peter Rowlett was conditioned upon the marriage of John Spears to Susana Womack. John Spears died on October 4, 1842. He was buried in the front exterior of Bethel Baptist Church. His gravesite is still there,

but his tombstone was later moved to the rear church cemetery.¹

Every generation since the founding of the United States has had a war. The Spears family was not an exception.

Both John and Austin Spears were farmers. Austin Spears enlisted on April 23, 1861 and served in the Confederate Army², 4th Regiment, Virginia Cavalry, CO. B as a Private³. This Virginia Unit fought in the Bermuda Hundred Campaign close to the family farm. The unit was still fighting when General Robert E. Lee arrived.

Austin was appointed on January 30, 1827⁴ to be the Midlothian area postmaster at the Hallsboro Tavern he had built. It is situated at the intersection of Old Buckingham Road (Route 60) and Huguenot Springs Road and adjacent to Bethel Baptist Church.



Austin was born on March 16, 1789, in Chesterfield County. He married Caroline Lavinia Wooldridge (1804-1875), daughter of Edward and Mary Leah Simpson. Austin is buried in Bethel Baptist Church in Midlothian, Virginia. Caroline died of dysentery on July 4, 1875. She is buried next to her husband. Austin’s mother died in 1866. Her burial site is unknown.

Austin’s family resided in a brick home at some point in time named “Turkey Run.” Turkey Run was razed in 2023 to make room for anything the Chesterfield School

Board would like to build on the property.

The Chesterfield Historical Society of

Virginia was allowed to photograph the house and interior by the Chesterfield School Board. The bricks and beautiful woodworks have been preserved and stored in hopes the house can be rebuilt elsewhere.



¹ Researched by George Cranford, Chesterfield Historical Society Volunteer

² U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865

³ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/9340595/austin-spears>

⁴ U.S., Appointments of U. S. Postmasters, 1832-1971

The house is professionally stored waiting for next steps, and The Justis House is pursuing all possibilities for its future. Virginia Justis, a retired Chesterfield County schoolteacher, was the owner of Turkey Run. She kept the house and grounds in immaculate condition. After her death, the property was sold to Chesterfield County. A school was built on the property, and the house was in the way of the school. After sitting empty for 3 years, vandals took a toll on the structure. A community committee did its best to reuse the building. Austin Spears' home waits and uncertainty waits for this beautiful home.

Remembering the Battle of Swift Creek

Colonel Guy Stratton, USMC (Ret)

Some 161 years ago, along the banks of Swift Creek, (modern-day Chesterfield and Colonial Heights boundary), “Billy Yank” and “Johnny Reb” engaged in a life and death struggle. This battle was a soldier’s fight conducted at the tactical level, within the operational mosaic of thrust and counter stroke whose aim was to help achieve Union and Confederate strategic goals. For the Union, it was about destroying Confederate field armies, capturing Richmond, Virginia and ending the war. For the South, it was to blunt and turn back Union military thrusts, protect its capital, defeat Lincoln in the 1864 election and not lose the war – thus securing the young nation’s independence.

The battle occurred on 9 May 1864 as the Union Army of the James, under the command of Major General Benjamin Butler, advanced southward towards Petersburg, Virginia, along the Richmond Turnpike¹ and ran into Confederate battle lines at Swift Creek. Butler was met by Confederate forces under the command of Brigadier General Bushrod R. Johnson, who commanded two confederate brigades consisting of troops from Virginia, South Carolina and Tennessee. One of these regiments was the 63rd Confederate Infantry Regiment.

The 63rd was organized on 30 July 1862, in eastern Tennessee, and was paroled at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia on 9 April 1865 with less than 50 men. It had gained honors at the bloody battle of Chickamauga, Georgia where it lost 202 men out of 404 engaged. On 8 April 1864, the regiment was transferred to Virginia’s theater of war with 405

¹ Current day Route 1 and old Jefferson Davis Highway.

officers and men. It was assigned to General Johnson’s Tennessee Brigade comprised of the 17th, 23rd, 25th and 44th regiments. These units would remain together until Appomattox. Following is Colonel Abraham Fulkerson’s, commanding the 63rd, 9 May 1864 battle report.²

“When the brigade occupied the line behind Swift Creek my regiment was posted at Level Ford, 1 1/2 miles below the Dunlap house, from which point Captain Millard, Company E, was deployed as skirmishers to the right and left-connecting with the Seventeenth and Twenty-third Tennessee on the left, and the Forty-fourth and Twenty-fifth on the right-at a point half a mile from Fort Clifton, holding a line near 2 1/2 miles in length. This was on May 8.

“Early on the morning of the 9th the enemy appeared on the bluffs on the opposite side of the creek, when sharp skirmishing commenced and was kept up from the ford or center to the left throughout the day and until a late hour at night.

“This part of the line was successfully held until relieved on the morning of the 10th, though during the night the enemy effected a crossing at the angle opposite the Dunlap house, and succeeded in getting a piece of artillery to the water's edge. This force was driven back promptly...

“About dusk General Johnson, requested me to drive the [Union] line back.”

Confederate companies A and K flank attack against the Union line was unsuccessful with having a loss of 2 killed. The following day, Union forces fell back towards their Bermuda Hundred base of operations.

The next time you drive to or from Chesterfield and Colonial Heights, stop and read the marker about the 63rd Confederate Infantry.



While the battle is an historical footnote, it was a life and death struggle for the “Yanks” and the “Rebs” engaged. Their sacrifice made it sacred ground – the real reason to remember!

² War of the Rebellion: Serial 068 Page 0250 OPERATIONS IN SE. VA. AND N. C. Chapter XLVIII.



**The Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia
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