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The Thomas Balch Chronicle

The Newsletter of Friends of the Thomas Balch Library of the Town of Leesburg, Virginia
A Library for History and Genealogy

Volume 7 Issue 4

Winter 2003

Friends' 8th Annual Meeting, Dec. 13

Celebrating eight years of activity, some seventy members of the Friends organization elected Paul Bice, of the James Monroe Bank, as their new board president and inducted their new board of directors to serve during the upcoming year. The occasion provided for the introduction of Alexandra Gressitt, newly appointed manager of the Thomas Balch Library, and an opportunity to honor retired manager, Jane Sullivan. Ms. Sullivan also was honored by the Loudoun Restoration and Preservation Society, with an engraved leaf in her name for the Friends' memorial tree, presented by Vernon Davis, president of the society.

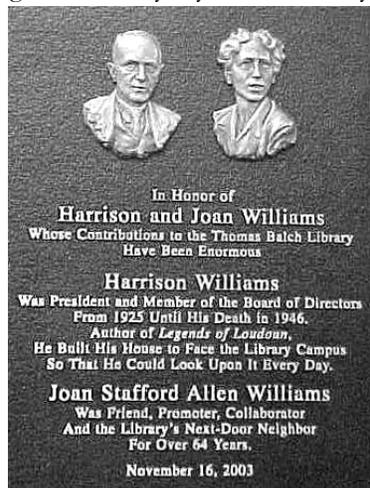
The group heard Dr. Jenny Masur, National Capital Regional Coordinator for the National Park Service describe the NPS's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. This program provides technical assistance to organizations attempting to identify, document, preserve and interpret sites, approximate travel routes and landscapes related to the Underground Railroad. Additionally, the Network to Freedom Program will demonstrate the significance of the Underground Railroad not only in the eradication of slavery, but as a cornerstone of our national civil rights movement (see page 2).

Outgoing president Fred Morefield was presented with a special gift from the board, commemorating his contribution to the success of the Friends' organization. During his tenure, the board commissioned the mural that graces the frieze atop the Mercer Room in the Thomas Balch Library, published the two volumes of *Essence of a People*, the five volumes of Eugene Scheel's *Loudoun Discovered*, provided for a part-time archivist to assist the library staff, funded indexing of several valuable document collections donated to the

Advisory Commission Honors Historians, Dedicates Harrison and Joan Williams Plaque

On November 16th, the Advisory Commission of the Library presented its annual History Awards to Betty Morefield and Evelyn Johnson. Mrs. Morefield had been nominated by Elaine Thompson primarily for her extensive efforts in producing the *Essence of a People* books. Ms. Johnson, nominated by Jim Hershman in recognition of her longtime contribution to the founding and development of the Bluemont Fair, and her research and preservation of a number of Bluemont historic sites.

Along with this annual event, the Commission honored two of the Library's strongest supporters over many years – the late Joan Stafford Allen Williams and her late husband, Harrison Williams. The Friends provided a handsome bronze plaque describing their contributions. It hangs in the entryway of the Library.



Library, and commissioned the portraits of the persons honored in the various rooms at the Library.

Also honored was outgoing board member Wynne Saffer, who will continue to serve the Balch as a member of the Acquisitions Committee.

More photos, pages 4



PHOTO BY FRAN POSTON
History Awardees and their nominators.
l to r: Elaine Thompson, Betty Morefield, Evelyn Johnson, Jim Hershman.

New Library Manager Welcomed

With great pleasure, Friends of the Thomas Balch Library welcome Ms. Alexandra Gressitt as the new Library Manager. She replaces Jane Sullivan, long time manager, who retired in June.

Ms. Gressitt comes to the Balch from Richmond, where she was the archives research services director for the Library of Virginia. She had previously served the William Henry Smith Memorial Library in Indianapolis, Ind., as curator of manuscripts, and she was archivist for the city of Hattiesburg, Miss. During that tenure, she set up archival and microfilm programs and began a records management program.

Ms. Gressitt holds an MA in Archival Management from the University of Washington, and an Arts History masters from North Carolina State University, Raleigh.

"I am delighted to be working with such a supportive and forward looking group and community. We have great things ahead of us in making the Thomas Balch Library even more useful to its patrons," said Ms. Gressitt.

A Glimpse into African American History To Launch on February 1

Education committee member Rachel Thompson continues her work on a primary documents project that will be launched at the Friends website on February 1. The documents, offering glimpses of African American history in Loudoun County, is an outgrowth of a lesson written last year for use when teachers brought students to the Balch for a fieldtrip. Although such fieldtrips are always encouraged, the committee recognizes that due to budgetary and time constraints that school staffs experience, this might sometimes be difficult. The idea here is to bring the Thomas Balch Library to the classroom through the website. At the site, teachers will find documents matched to eight "essential understandings" about African American history, and linked to the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL). By the launch date, documents to support the first four "essential understandings" will be in place; other documents will be added incrementally.

Throughout the course of this project's development, the Balch staff, especially LaVonne Markham, Lee Catlett, and Mary Fishback, has assisted the committee. When Mrs. Markham was involved in the first phase of this program, she put Mrs. Thompson in touch with Denise Oliver-Velez, the great-great granddaughter of a Loudoun County freed slave, Pressley Roberts. Mrs. Oliver-Velez provided documents and photographs that allowed us to trace the Roberts family from emancipation to the present time, and to use that information at the site. Library staffer Shirley Mann introduced the committee to Jerry Michael who wrote *The Year After*, [the Civil War] a collection of articles from local newspapers of the time. The book is replete with information bearing on the history of blacks in Loudoun during that crucial period. The Black History Committee of the Friends responded immediately to our request to use four biographies from *The Essence of a People* to illustrate "essential understandings."

Finally, Gene Scheel has generously allowed us to use his updated and edited chronology of African American

history in Loudoun on the site.

The committee also appreciates the help of Karen Hughes White of the Afro-American Historical Association. Through her, we gained permission to use *Black Laws of Virginia*, including its entire introduction, written by Joan Peters. Its inclusion at the site will give teachers a much better understanding of the relationship of whites to both free Negroes and slaves in the antebellum period. Waterford historians John and Bronwen Souders provided runaway slave ads from the *Genius of Liberty*. In the next phase of the project, Betty Morefield and Elaine Thompson's coverage of African American Churches and Mutual Aid Societies, *Courage, My Soul*, will be valuable. Jenny Masur of the Underground Railroad Network will continue to assist.

Education chairperson, Annie Hulen, has directed the technical development of the project, with the help of web designer, Stacie Zakrzewski. Janet Manthos has diligently transcribed the difficult-to-read texts of the scanned documents that you will see at the site.

The experience of gathering documents for this project reinforces the richness of the Balch Library and its network as a repository of information about the history of African Americans in Loudoun County.

Rachel Thompson

Balch Library and the Underground Railroad Network

Last year, the Thomas Balch Library was certified an official Underground Railway Research Site by the National Park Service, as a part of the NPS Network to Freedom. Two excellent resources, *The Underground Railroad: Dramatic Firsthand Accounts of Daring Escapes to Freedom* by Charles L. Blockson and *The Underground Railroad* by William Still are part of the Balch collection. Additionally, an extensive bibliography, assembled by the National Capitol Region of the NPS is available, and the library provides an African American Pathfinder for help in locating materials.



TV Program Features Thomas Balch Library

Adelphia Channel 3/Loudoun is airing a half-hour video program about the Thomas Balch Library each Monday through Friday, at 11:30 am and at 4:30 pm, during January.

The show, part of the popular series *On This Ground*, is written, directed and filmed by Channel 3/Loudoun producer John Vicardi. It features views of the library, interviews with Library Manager Alexandra Gressitt about the collections and with staffer Mary Fishback about some of its history. The portraits by Kurt Schwarz are shown, and William Woodward talks about his painting the Loudoun County mural that graces the skylight in the Mercer Room, and his *Meeting the Piscataway* in the Howard W. Clark, Sr. Room.

Belmont Ridge Middle School Exhibits

The completed projects of eighth grade students of Ms. Julie Hildbold's Primary Resource Research class at Belmont Ridge Middle School are displayed at the Thomas Balch Library until mid-February.

The assignment: to completely research the history, ownership, and disposition of a chosen historic property or person in Loudoun County, using the facilities of the Balch library, Loudoun County court records, personal interviews and on-site visits. The students then produced attractive and informative posters about each property or individual, lavishly illustrated with original photos and copies of older photos of owners, the houses, and other pertinent facts. Each is a work of art, and not to be missed.

Participating students and their project properties:

- Arati Kotadia - Morven Park
- Kelly Malacarne - White's Ferry
- Christopher Bernstorff - Lightfoot Restaurant Building
- Trevor Grywatch - Union Cemetery
- Shreya Patil - Morven Park
- Rachel Leon and Michelle Ward - Oatlands
- Chelsea Pharr - Margaret Mercer
- Lindsey Miller - Dodona Manor
- Jacquelyn Cullen - James Madison

2003 Year End Committee Reports

Acquisitions Committee

The Friends provided funding for a part time archivist to help the Library staff handle the large backlog of donated material. Archivist George Hruneni held the position for several months and specifically worked on manuscript collections, including the Rust family papers. The Friends will await the new manager to determine if the position should be refilled.

Education Committee

The Friends' Website is online, and continually being fine tuned and tweaked to make it as user friendly and valuable as possible. Your comments and suggestions are welcomed.

Brand new is the index for all five volumes of the *Loudoun Discovered* books, available on the WEB at Town of Leesburg's site: www.leesburgva.org/departments/library/bookindex/search. There is a direct link from the Friends' site as well.

Two exciting new brochures, designed by Brenda Douglass, Advertising Management, Inc., will be printed.

An exceedingly important project of the Committee is: A Glimpse into African American History. (see accompanying article).

The Thomas Balch Chronicle is produced four times a year. Here again, we seek your suggestions for improvement, and for items you would like to see featured.

Black History Committee

2003 has been a most productive year for the Committee which:

Hosted a recognition program for the oral history project participants.

Sponsored a round-table discussion entitled "African-Americans: Middleburg in Retrospective" at the Sheila C. Johnson Performing Arts Center.

Visited the African American Garden at the Heritage Farm Museum

Provided a "reader" for the Loudoun Literacy program at the courthouse.

Was awarded funding from the Loudoun Library Foundation and Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy to publish a map and guide to African American communities and sites in Loudoun Co.

Presented a genealogy workshop, facilitated by African American genealogist Arlean Hill.

Sponsored a World War II roundtable discussion featuring African American veterans. Participating: John H. Middleton, Frank Watkins, Richard Roberts, Basham Simms, Pete Roberts.

Participated in a project with the Loudoun Museum to develop an exhibit entitled "Resistance to Slavery in Loudoun County." Completion is planned for January.

Met with the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors regarding naming a road in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Applied for grant from LRPS to fund a video about African American business in Leesburg.

Book Sales

Total sales of books published by the Friends' organization have reached and passed the \$35,000 mark.. These include Eugene Scheel's five volume set, *Loudoun Discovered: Communities, Corners & Crossroads*, the highly popular Essence books. The first of these, *The Essence of a People: Portraits of African Americans Who Made a Difference in Loudoun County, Virginia*, is in very short supply. *The Essence of a People II: African Americans Who Made Their World Anew in Loudoun County, Virginia and Beyond* continues to sell well. Another publication made possible by the Friends is the Home Interest Club of Western Loudoun's *HIC Cookbook*. This small volume proved highly popular, and has required two reprints. All books are available at the Thomas Balch Library, on line, and at some 16 commercial outlets around the County.

As a matter of interest, we have received and filled orders for the books from a number of out-of-town libraries and historical societies: Prince William Public Library; The Library of Virginia Foundation; Arlington County Public Library; Dallas (TX) Public Library; Allen County (IN) Public Library; Wisconsin Historical Society; Alexandria Public Library; Birmingham (AL) Public Library. And our own Loudoun County Library has placed them in all local branches.

Grants Committee

Grants Awarded:

2003 Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy -

\$3000 awarded to the:

Black History Committee: To publish *Loudoun County's Historically African American Communities: A Tour Map and Guide*

2003 Loudoun Library Foundation - \$3500 matching grant awarded to the:

Black History Committee to publish *Loudoun County's Historically African American Communities: A Tour Map and Guide*

Grants Applied For:

The Loudoun Library Foundation grant application for 2004 has been submitted in January.

Membership Committee

Friends' membership is nearly 200 persons who are working to make the Thomas Balch Library the finest historic and genealogy resource in Northern Virginia.

Instituted this year was the Member to Member program that lets others know of the important work accomplished by the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, as well as giving exposure to the Library's collections. When a member gives a gift membership to one or more family and friends, we extend the donor's membership for a year, as our thanks.

It's important that the Friends' work becomes known throughout the county and beyond. We are not the keepers of a book depository - we are the keepers of a teaching, research, and learning institution, available to all.

Memorials Committee

The Friends continue to offer several ways to honor family members, mark special events, memorialize ancestors or recognize outstanding individuals or organizations.

Memorial bricks are inscribed and placed in the Harrison Rose Garden and sell for \$100 each. Large and small brass leaves may be purchased, inscribed and added to the Tree of History, located in the library foyer. They sell for \$500 and \$250 respectively. Order forms are available at the Library, or on the Friends' website.

Donations to the collections are always welcome as well, and the Friends offer bookplates for recognition. Donations to the collections must fit the parameters of the library's acquisitions policies.

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Annual Meeting 2003: Honoring Old Friends, Welcoming New Ones



New Board President Paul Bice



VP Annie Hulen welcomes new board member Reginald Simms



Lee Catlett, new board member



Paul Bice, Ann Noel, Leland Maban and Suzanne Chadwick await the festivities.



BHC chair Pauline Singletary gives the year-end report.



New board member Sallie Vaaler chats with Friend's member, Mary Plaster. Behind them, Shirley Mann, Brenda Douglass, & Lee Catlett.



New Library Manager Alexandra Gressitt and her mother, Doris Gressitt, were welcomed by the Friends.



Outgoing Friends' president Fred Morefield was presented with protection from low ceilings.



A special medal for outgoing board member, Wynne Saffer, presented by Annie Hulen.



Fred Morefield and Jane Sullivan, still jousting, just before the Friends' honored Jane.

At right: One more honor, Jane Sullivan's photo and plaque to be posted at TBL. Jane is assisted by staffer LaVonne Markham.



Vernon Davis, Loudoun Restoration & Preservation Society's president, honors Jane Sullivan for her long service to Loudoun.

ALL PHOTOS BY MARY FISHBACK

Letter From the President

I am honored and humbled to be asked to serve as the President of Friends of the Thomas Balch Library. I recall a few years back meeting with Leland Mahan and his introducing me to Fred Morefield. Need I say more - Fred quickly swept me up in his enthusiasm for the Library and the Friends. In December we honored a good friend, a wonderful supporter of the Friends and of the Thomas Balch Library - Fred Morefield. We will continue to receive and appreciate his wisdom and abilities, as he will remain on the board.

Friends of the Thomas Balch Library was organized in 1995 with the sole mission of supporting and expanding its collections and of preserving the building itself. Now, in 2004, the excitement level is high for the work to be done. I am very pleased with the new Friends' board team which we have pulled together to help in the mission. We enthusiastically welcome Alexandra Gressitt as the new Library Manager. The entire board, eighteen dedicated individuals, will be working closely with Ms. Gressitt to assist the library in its activities.

Our first focus will be directed toward the story of World War II and its effect on Loudoun County. We will continue gathering oral histories of veterans. The topic of oral histories is huge and exciting. A number of our board members have shown interest in preparing an educational series to teach library patrons ways to preserve their own family histories using such oral history methods and the many additional tools available at the Thomas Balch Library.

I ask for your continued support of the Friends and of the Thomas Balch Library. This library has a wealth of treasures just waiting to be discovered again!

Paul Bice

From the Library Manager

Though arriving in the midst of a celebratory season, I have had many opportunities to meet with the Friends, the Advisory Commissioners and many patrons of the Thomas Balch Library. It has been a pleasure and I extend my thanks and appreciation to each and every one for the very warm welcome.

While it's a bit too early to address long term program and development goals, in the coming months we will continue to expand critical core collections of the Balch library, focus on cataloging and accounting for all acquisitions, seek ways to incorporate into our collections materials relating to the growing cultural diversity of Loudoun County, enhance our outreach program, address safety and security issues and seek ways to market the Balch library and its mission. As with any living institution, vitality and growth result in expanding collections. Thus space considerations and staffing needs will be reviewed. I am excited to have this opportunity to work with so dedicated and supportive a community.

Since the last newsletter, exhibits in the library have included 19th and 20th century toys from the collection of Teckla Cox, and a display of old Loudoun County photographs, many of which came from the Winslow Williams collection at the Balch. In November, the recently conserved 1820s sketch of Lafayette's visit to Leesburg was put on display once again. January's

More Upcoming Events

Advisory Commission Meetings: 2nd Wednesday of the month, 7 p.m. Open to the public.

Loudoun Genealogical Society Meetings: 1st Wednesday every other month, 7 p.m. Public welcome.

Civil War Round Table: 2nd Tuesday of the month, except for July and August. 7:30 p.m. Public welcome.

Meetings are held at Thomas Balch Library - 703-737-719

Friends of the Thomas Balch Library

invite you to join us!

Yes! I wish to join the Friends and play an important role in supporting the collections and programs of the Thomas Balch Library

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Individual \$20.00

Family \$25.00

Student/Senior \$15.00

Patron \$50.00

Sustaining \$100.00

Benefactor \$250.00

No, I do not wish to join, but I would like to make a tax deductible contribution of \$_____

Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc., is a 501(c)3 corporation

Please forward with your check to:

Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc

P.O. Box 2184 Leesburg, VA 20177

A Reminder to Friends of the Balch Library:

Don't forget to renew your Friends' membership. It's truly an investment in the future; by contributing to the preservation of our past, you ensure that this information is there for the generations to come. And you can use this form for your friends.

Or better yet, take advantage of the Member to Member program. When you give a gift membership to one or more of your family and friends, we will extend your membership for a year, as our thanks. What could be an easier way to help TBL?

displays include sites and events in Leesburg and Loudoun County, including a project developed by Blue Ridge Middle School students. These young people have produced an impressive exhibit of various historic sites in the County.

A number of manuscript collections and books were added through donation and purchase since November. Of particular interest is the recent donation of Harrison Williams family papers.

Once again, I look forward to working with the staff and the community to make the Thomas Balch Library an even more valuable and helpful resource.

Alexandra Gressitt, Library Manager

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