



1922-2004

# The Thomas Balch Chronicle

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

Volume 8 Issue 2

Summer 2004

## Oral Histories Galore at Thomas Balch Library

As you step into the Westmoreland Davis Room at the Thomas Balch Library, look to your immediate right. There you will find, neatly hanging in archival sleeves, some 150 oral histories, arranged alphabetically by the name of the person being interviewed. Within the sleeves are, for the most part, transcriptions, appropriate photos, and in some cases cassette tapes of the interviews. On the shelf above are two index binders. The smaller one of 65 pages is arranged alphabetically by subject of interview, persons, places and events. The larger one is 321 pages, alphabetically listing by subject, interviewed individual, interviewer, date of interview, birth date of interviewee, and time period discussed. There is considerable cross indexing by all of the above. It is possible to spend hours reading and listening to these voices of the past describing life and events long gone. You will find these pages and voices filled with reminiscences, some sad and disturbing, others humorous and heartening. All of them are valuable, if only for the insight they provide. A sampling, to pique your interest:

### Carrie Nokes, Sterling

Interviewer: Pauline Singletary (2002)

Q: Was Smith Switch a community?

A.: No, it was a big old farm. In those days you didn't have clusters of houses. You'd go for miles without seeing a house and my father was born in Sugarland. They call it Sugarland now but it was right close to the river and his father's oldest brothers were over in Maryland. They used to communicate by

going on the little old boat from Virginia to Maryland and the family is like that now. Half of the Nokes family is in Virginia and the other half is in Maryland. So the school closed when during World War II family moved away



DONNA PATTERSON/TBL ARCHIVES

and they didn't have enough students to keep the school opened. So when it happened the county closed the school and the children that still needed schooling had to . . . the younger part of my family was one of them, they either had to take the old Washington and Dominion Railroad which is now the bike trail and they would go the Ashburn to school. Ashburn school house is one of the oldest black one room schools in the county.

### Esther Cowart, Hamilton

Interviewer: Mark Grupe (1976)

Q: How often did you or your family use the train?

A.: We were very close to the operation of the train. My father was interested principally because of his business. And we depended upon it for the delivery of, well not only the ingredients for mixing the farm feeds, dairy, hog and turkey feed, such as that. But also to ship the wheat and grains harvested in the county to Washington and were very dependent upon it for business reasons and then enjoyed it particularly in the winter time when driving into Washington on unpaved Route 7 was quite a chore. And when you started out you never knew how many flat tires you were going to have nor how many mud holes you were going to get stuck in.

### Basham Simms, Purcellville

Interviewer: Not indicated (1976)

Q: What was the depression like in Loudoun?

A.: Well, there were a tremendous amount of people out of work here in Loudoun, but everyone seemed to have survived, and it was during that period of time that the water line in Purcellville was put in and, of course people seemed to find it necessary to rent rooms and give meals to the workless because a lot of them came from Georgia and Alabama, and all of the lines were put in with picks and shovels. Each person could only work three days. They had to turn [in] their tools so that another man could work.

### Sarah Harrison Scheetz, Leesburg

Interviewer: Eugene M. Scheel (1977)

(Interview is a narration.)

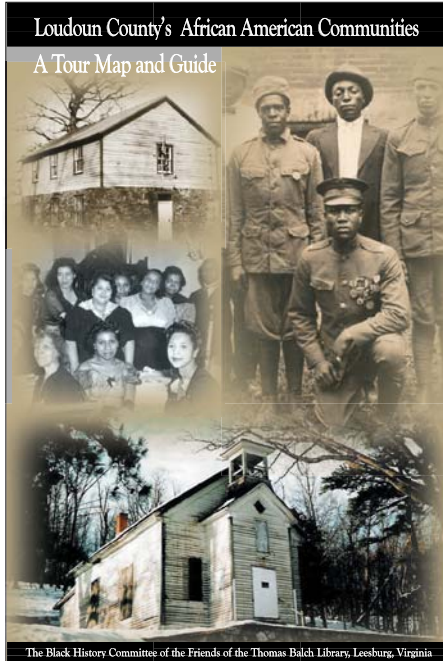
"I can remember torchlight parades. On the Fourth of July, Uncle Elijah B. White and Mr. Clint Saffer would lead a parade from the top of Vinegar Hill on Market Street to the town limits at the library. On horseback; they always rode magnificent horses. After dark this thing would begin; it was a beautiful thing to see. A band played before the parade.

". . . Time came for progress: the great white way. They put in those new street lights and widened Market and King -- but King was the great white way. They widened them about six inches on each side which meant that many of the trees had to come down. It was about 1925, and they tore up the brick pavements and put down cement pavements around the courthouse, which thrilled us because it meant we had more places to roller skate. This really caused a stir!

"You know there was a horse show grounds. Summertime it was hot. Must have been July or August. They had trot and canter and jumping, the usual horse show. They had a huge grandstand. I remember the grandstand vividly because my father wouldn't let us sit in it. The props were weak, he thought. My father became Commonwealth's Attorney for about twenty years. We went through every case with him. There were all types of threats to him and his family. I used to play poker with the FBI while my father went around with the Sheriff."

# Handsome New Guide and Map Joins Friends' Publications Listings

Fresh off the press is the latest publication from the Black History Committee of Friends of the Thomas Balch Library: *Loudoun County's African American Communities: A Tour Map & Guide*



This full-color, illustrated, twenty-four page booklet with map takes you on a trip through Loudoun's rich black history. Beginning largely in the post-eman- cipation period, African Americans built homes, schools, churches, fraternal

lodges, and businesses throughout the county. Some communities have died out while others have remained vital; many buildings survive despite changes in the landscape. A narrative introduction and brief descriptions of forty-four settle- ments and neighborhoods are enhanced by thirty-two illustrations—many of them archival photographs—and a fold- out map marked with communities, churches, and schools. Grant assistance came from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the Loudoun Restora- tion and Preservation Society, and the Loudoun Library Foundation. It is avail- able for \$5.00 at the Thomas Balch Li- brary, the Loudoun Museum and other shops around the County.

The *Guide* was designed by Stilson Greene and printed by The Printery in Leesburg. Initial plans were to produce an 18" x 24" two-color fold-out bro- chure, but the material was so rich it was expanded. Acting on Stilson Greene's recommendation, the 4" x 6" booklet with fold-out map better accommodates the text and showcases the images. The Black History Committee is most grate- ful to him for the time and talent he in- vested in the work. The VFH and LRPS grants supported developing the content of the publication, while the LLF grant funded the design and printing. The

Black History Committee contributed ad- ditional funds to both phases.

## We Need Your Marketing Skills

As Thomas Balch Library moves forward with programs and collection development under the direction of Library Manager Alexandra S. Gressitt, it's clear that creative marketing strategies are needed. To this end, the Friends are seeking a chairperson for a recently orga- nized Marketing Committee.

Several Board members and other enthusiastic volunteers are already working in various areas of promotion, but we need your commitment to oversee this ex- tremely important part of the Friends' initiatives in supporting the Library. Please contact any Board member and volunteer your time in service to your com- munity.

## New & Renewing Members Since the March Newsletter

Ethel L. Adams  
Mr. & Mrs. Russell W. Baker  
Gretha C. Blake  
Esther M. Chauncey  
Margaret R. Clarridge  
Mrs. Lalla H. Dodge  
Nancy Hsu & James A. Dumbrell  
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Forbes  
Elizabeth R. Frain  
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Mark Herring  
Evelyn A. Johnson  
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Mrs. Jean P. McDonald  
Barbara M. Meives  
Elizabeth Brand Monroe

George A. & Austin A. Miller  
G. Shirley Myers, Jr.  
Mr. & Mrs. Edward Nichols, Jr.  
Ann & Paul Noel  
Ms. Jane G. Packard  
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph L. Perritte  
Juanita & Joe Pierson  
Judith T. Reinhardt  
Mr. & Mrs. Gerald Rhodes  
Cheryl Sadowski & William Fulham  
Glenn & Grace Scatterday  
Ann D. Schneider  
Reginald Simms  
Mr. & Mrs. Michael E. Snyder  
Alice J. Stine  
Rachel Y. Thompson  
Karen & Templar Titus  
Mr. & Mrs. Willis Van Devanter  
Karen Washburn  
George & Susan Webber  
Norman Works

## Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc. 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
Business/Professional	\$ 35.00
Patron	\$ 50.00
Sustaining	\$100.00
Benefactor	\$250.00

Please forward with your check to:

**Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc**  
**P.O. Box 2184 Leesburg, VA 20177**

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

## Letter from the President

Friends of the TBL, working closely with Alexandra Gressitt and the Advisory Commission, have been busy with a number of projects. It is very exciting to see the wealth of Loudoun County history being unlocked, revealed and archived.

As our nation emphasizes the remembrance and documentation of our World War II heroes, we too are working to gather firsthand accounts of the life and times of our own citizens, those who fought overseas as well as those who remained behind in Loudoun County. Much of our focus has been on the gathering of Oral Histories from those who lived through this time. We are very excited to see the number of opportunities we have had and continue to have, to record the stories, and often to photograph, these wonderful people. In the future, we look forward to compiling this effort into a detailed presentation to the public. Please look to our website, [www.balchfriends.org](http://www.balchfriends.org), for information on a number of projects and ways you can personally become involved to support the Thomas Balch Library, which is called "the jewel in the crown" of the Town of Leesburg.

The Friends' Black History Committee actively continues with various projects including a documentary video on Leesburg's twentieth-century history through the memories of Wilson Townsend, Jr. The Friends hope to introduce the documentary film at a premiere showing at the Tally Ho Theatre later this year. The project is made possible through a Loudoun Library Foundation grant. Also, the new publication *Loudoun*

## Letter from the Manager

For the last couple months there has been much activity with the building. Construction bids are being sought to fix leaks in the library, restore windows in the old portion of the facility and paint heavily used areas. Pavers in the parking lot were removed and reset.

One of the less well-utilized library spaces is the beautifully maintained grounds. The garden, with benches attractively set around the fountain, is a delightful location for lunch or just a few moments of reflection or quiet during a hectic day.

During late winter and early spring there were numerous pro-



PHOTO: MARY FISHBACK

*The B. Powell and Agnes Harrison Memorial Garden*

*County's African American Communities: A Tour Map and Guide.* is now on sale at Thomas Balch Library, at local retail outlets, and soon, on-line. The final product is spectacular.

Loudoun County Public Schools' 8th Annual Social Studies Fair was held June 2-4 at Carradoc Hall in Leesburg. Judges traditionally include staff members of Thomas Balch Library. This year, Alexandra S. Gressitt and Mary Fishback presented the Balch Library Award to Dominion High School student Joy Williams, for her exhibit *Many Races, One Face*, entered in the Family History category. The Friends support the Loudoun County Public Schools Social Studies programs and the Thomas Balch Library by providing a \$25 check to the award winner each year.

In 2004, the Friends are operating within an \$87,000 budget. The major budgetary items include \$20,000 for acquisitions and support to the Library, \$17,000 for various approved support projects of the Black History Committee, \$15,000 for the World War II Project, chaired by Fred Morefield, and \$10,000 for the Education/Marketing Committee.

We always welcome and appreciate your involvement and support of the Thomas Balch Library.

*Paul W. Bice, President*

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**Please don't forget to check the date  
for your membership renewal.  
You will find it on the mailing label.**

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grams and exhibits. These included talks on The Northern Neck Land Grants by Wynne Saffer, a two part genealogical class by Jinx Hartung and a successful photo identification party at the Purcellville Library led by Phyllis Ford and Shirley Mann. Exhibits included one in March by the Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc.; an exhibit on the Confederacy in April and one on Thomas Balch Library and the Balch family during May. Forthcoming exhibits include, two in June, one by the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc. and the other by the Balch Library on World War II. During July and August John Creamer will curate an exhibit on local Civil War relics.

Balch Library will be participating in a Scavenger Hunt for students in conjunction with the Mosby Heritage Area Association and has been offered a donation of \$50 for every ticket we sell for the annual conference on the Art of Command in the Civil War to be held October 8-10, 2004. If you are contemplating attending I encourage you to pick up an application from the Balch Library.

Thanks to the hard work of staff, especially Lee Catlett, a new flyer, "Professional Researchers & Other Research Facilities" is now available from the Balch Library.

On May 18 a party honoring Thomas Balch Library volunteers and Irene Moore was held. Irene, after more than ten years of dedicated work with the Balch Library and even more years with the Loudoun County Library System will be retiring June 2. While we will all miss her, we wish her well.

*Alexandra S. Gressitt, Library Manager*

## Calendar of Events:

Look forward to a number of interesting and enlightening programs planned for fall 2005, such as:

Highly praised Basic Genealogy Courses  
A how-to on Deed research  
Learn to use the Census, both on-line and print versions  
Popular Appraisal Fair  
Military Record research seminar  
Speaker on James Monroe  
Speaker from the White House Historical Society  
Courthouse tours  
American and Virginia musical works

And in spring 2005, workshop on Ethnic Genealogy

**Friends of the Thomas Balch Library Board Meetings:** 3rd Tuesday of the month, 9 a.m. Open to the public.

**Advisory Commission for the Thomas Balch Library Meetings:** 2nd Wednesday of the month, 7 p.m. Open to the public.

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

Unless noted, all events are held at the Thomas Balch Library, 208 W. Market Street, Leesburg, VA 703-737-7195



## The Thomas Balch Chronicle

Friends of the  
Thomas Balch Library  
P. O. Box 2184  
Leesburg, VA 20177



### Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc.

P.O. Box 2184  
Leesburg, VA 20177

**E-Mail:**

[info@balchfriends.org](mailto:info@balchfriends.org)

**Website:**

[www.balchfriends.org](http://www.balchfriends.org)

**Board of Directors:** Paul Bice, *President*;  
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*Assistant-treasurer*.

## Thomas Balch Library

208 West Market Street  
Leesburg, Virginia 20176

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[balchlib@leesburgva.org](mailto:balchlib@leesburgva.org)

**Website:**

[www.leesburgva.org](http://www.leesburgva.org)

**Hours:**

Mon., Thurs & Fri. 10-5  
Tues. 10-8 • Wed. 2-8  
Sat. 11-4 • Sun. 1-5

**Advisory Commission for  
The Thomas Balch Library  
The Town of Leesburg, Virginia**

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Francis Fera, *Vice Chairman*

Jim Hershman

Jim Lucier

Tom Marshall

Joan Rokus

Martha Schonberger

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Alexandra S. Gressitt, *Secretary  
and Library Manager*