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

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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*

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Summer 2006

## Desperate Women: Fighting Slavery in Virginia's Potomac Hinterland

On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, for Women's History Month, Dr. Deborah Lee gave a presentation on the women in her study of antislavery activity in the then Virginia counties of Fairfax, Loudoun, Clarke, Frederick, Jefferson, and Berkeley. For those of you unable to attend, we offer here a more extensive report on her study:

Dr. Lee highlighted the stories of black and white, free and bond, slaveholding and non-slaveholding women and the ways in which antislavery women were deeply connected to others, even across racial lines, more cognizant of moral complexity, and more responsive to the practical concerns of others. While these qualities made them less likely to take bold public action, the love and kindness they shared undermined the rationale of slavery, mitigated the psychological damage of slavery on themselves and other members of their communities, and facilitated social justice and interracial comity.

Enslaved women were the most desperate, sometimes acting out in the strongest possible terms, by taking lives. Documented cases of murder, suicide, and infanticide can be interpreted as resistance to slavery. Slavery was enforced by violence, and whites and blacks alike suffered from what psychologists sometimes call soul murder. Yet, violent incidents perpetrated by blacks against whites were very rare.

More often, even enslaved women chose life affirming ways to express their desire for freedom. John W. Jones's grandmother and mother pointed to geese flying north and told him of a promised land where all men were free. With his mother's support, he escaped with two brothers, but left his sisters behind.

Girls and women were less likely to escape— young men were most likely—but some desperate ones tried. The *Genius of Liberty* includes an 1818 ad for two Fairfax County women, one of whom was "far advanced in pregnancy." In 1828, it reported "a crop of runaways"—an apparent family group of twenty-two people that included at least ten females age 7 to 55.

Women sometimes assisted freedom seekers. In one unusual escape, a white woman and her ten-year-old daughter procured a carriage and

escorted bondman Joshua Pusey of Leesburg to Pennsylvania in 1856.

Enslaved women often awaited legal means of emancipation. John W. Jones's sister, Alice Stover, went to live with him in Elmira after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect in 1863. White women sometimes ignored laws forbidding education, instructing free and enslaved African Americans.

Quaker women often aided people of color. William and Priscilla Tate housed Kitty Paine and two children after they were freed, kidnapped by their emancipator's heir, and freed again. William's three sisters housed the eldest daughter. Judy Gaskins purchased her freedom with the help of Quakers, then worked as a cook for Samuel and Elizabeth Janney. In 1886, Gaskins recalled Samuel as "a very fine man," but she reserved her highest praise for Elizabeth, who, during a serious illness, had nursed her like her own mother. The Janney girls helped her raise \$300 (\$6,000 today) to purchase her daughter.

Elite slaveholding women acted on antislavery convictions through the American Colonization Society. Ann Randolph Page married one of the largest slaveholders in Frederick County. She became depressed, likely a symptom of soul murder, until an elderly blind black woman helped her find joy in religion and recognize the evil of slavery. Similarly, Lilly, "a freed servant" of Molly Custis of Arlington (R. E. Lee's mother-in-law) wrote a three-page letter giving her help and spiritual counsel during illness, and expressing love and gratitude for the same. Margaret Mercer of Loudoun County voiced colonizationist women's philosophy in a letter to Gerrit Smith. They desired abolition, but not at the expense of disunion and violence. To these desperate women, colonization seemed a practical approach toward ending slavery that avoided aggression in speech and action.

Viewed together, these black and white antislavery women appear committed and loving. They were strong like water, which gives freely to all, flows in low places that others avoid, and eventually wears down stone. It is impossible to say how long such an approach would have taken to end slavery, but their work contributed to social justice and racial healing. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said in the next century, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

## Griffith and Mahoney Family Papers at TBL

In November 2004, Robert Griffith Mahoney presented his family papers to Thomas Balch Library. This was an exciting addition to the library's manuscript holdings, particularly since the documentary record for African American families is sparse. The collection consists of correspondence, financial records, legal documents, cards and postcards, photo-



Robert Mahoney presents his family's papers to Manager Alexandra Gressitt.

graphs, and memorabilia. Most of the early documents are from the Griffith family, with items from the Mahoney family appearing later. Financial records comprise the largest group of items, consisting largely of receipts. These include poll taxes paid for various family members, rent payments, medical bills, shop accounts, and expenses for burial plots. There are also several photographs of members of both families. The items range in date from 1846-1944, with the bulk dating from 1870-1935.

The Griffith and Mahoney families were part of a well-established community of free African Americans in the Hillsboro area. Forrest and Henry Griffith, William Mahoney and Ellzey Furr were among the founding members of the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, established in 1864. The early congregation met at Pulpit Rock, located south of Hillsboro, using the white Arnold Grove Methodist Church at night. They built their own church nearby in 1887 on land that included a piece donated by Ellzey and Fanny Furr.

The Griffith and Mahoney Family Papers (M 018) provide a unique opportunity to follow two African American families' progress in Loudoun County from

the antebellum period through the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Forrest Griffith was born into slavery in the Hillsboro, VA area around 1790. He was enslaved by James and Margaret McIlhane, who were prominent landowners with extensive holdings in Loudoun County. Griffith purchased his freedom and that of his daughter Frances "Fanny" (born ca. 1834), from Margaret McIlhane around 1839. His wife, also named Fanny (born ca. 1790), was a free woman, although there is little information about her or how she obtained her freedom. The Griffiths owned 15 acres of land near Hillsboro, which they bought in 1847. By 1860, Griffith was an established land owner, with property valued at \$500.00. In addition to Fanny, the couple had one son, Henry Griffith, born 27 April 1846.

Fanny married Ellzey (Elsy) Furr, a free African American neighbor, and settled near her parents' home. They had eight children: Robert, Henry, Harriett, Mary, Forrest, Permelia, Frances and Emma. Henry married Ann M. Cartwright and had seven children: Ella, Henry, Annie, Warren Cartwright, Ernest, Hattie and Viola. Hugh, Viola's son, also lived with the family. The Griffith and Mahoney families were joined with the marriage of Annie to William "Willie" Mahoney, a descendant of Eliza Mahoney.

Eliza Mahoney and her children – William, Bushrod, Charles Henry, Richard, Catharine and Wesley – appear as free people in the *Register of Free Negroes* by oath of Charles F. Anderson in 1856. There is no evidence extant about the identity of her husband. William Mahoney married a woman named Martha (last name unknown) and had seven children: Joseph N., Sarah M., James F., Willie, Ella, Bertie and Robert. Willie Mahoney married Annie Griffith, and they moved to Montclair, Essex County, N.J. during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They had one son, Carl Henry Mahoney. Carl married Dorothy Miller and had two children, Robert Griffith Mahoney and William Mahoney. Carl moved to California with his family, where his son Robert Mahoney resides.

Stephanie Adams, Archivist

## Black History Committee Presents New History Series

On Saturday, June 24, 2006, the Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library will present the first of a series of talks on African American history: *Updating Our History: George Washington Lemoine Pierce Carver, Scientist, Artist, Musician and Billy Pierce: Son of Purcellville, Dance Master in New York, 1923-1932*



The speaker is Lemoine Pierce, a graduate of the Rutgers University School of Law, now a retired professor of legal studies and a cultural historian. Ms. Pierce is an advocate of cultural repatriation and a donor to a range of cultural institutions. Her popular workshop, *Giving Back: Guidelines for Donating Cultural Valuables—Art, Books and Personal Papers*, is designed to inspire others. A native of Harlem, Ms. Pierce lives in Atlanta and is a member of the part time faculty of the J. Mack Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University. This program is open to the public.

## New Acquisitions for Thomas Balch Library

*A Pride of Place – Fauquier County Houses*

by Kimberly Williams

*August 24, 1814* by Carole Herrick

*Black Cargoes* by Daniel Mannix

*Civil War Railroads* by George Abdill

*Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (9 volumes)

by Ray Basler

*Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania* (3 volumes) by John Jordan

*Creating Black Americans* by Nell Painter

*From Anatolia to Appalachia* by Joseph Scolnick

*Guide My Feet, Hold My Hand*

by Mary Goins Gandy (an account of Underground Railroad through Loudoun County)

*Jamestown Ancestors, 1607-1699*

by Virginia Davis

*Our Mothers' War*

by Emily Yellin (local author)

*Walking by Faith – Diary of Angelina Grimke*

by Charles Wilbanks

**A Reminder to Friends of the Thomas Balch Library**  
Be certain to renew your Friends' membership.  
Check your label for your own renewal date,  
and enlist your friends, too.

## DAR Marking Ceremony

Since 1955 Kettoctin Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, has dedicated fifteen historic markers in Loudoun County. On May 21 they presented Thomas Balch Library with their sixteenth, honoring the library for its commitment to preserving American heritage. The marker, which is to be installed by the main entrance, was accepted by the Library Manager on behalf of Thomas Balch Library, the Advisory Commission, and the Town of Leesburg. We are honored by this national recognition. The event was attended by approximately 40 people including Leesburg Supervisor and former Mayor Jim Clem; Chair of the TBL Advisory Commission Martha Schonberger; TBL Advisory Commissioners James H. Hershman, Jr. and James P. Roberts; members of Friends of TBL; members of Kettoctin Chapter of NSDAR and dignitaries of NSDAR.

Kettoctin Chapter Regent Patricia H. Miller presided over the dedication ceremony. Library staff member Mary Fishback spoke briefly on the history of Thomas Balch Library. Melanie Torrance recounted Kettoctin Chapter's five year saga to obtain national recognition for Thomas Balch Library and the Town of Leesburg. Two representatives from the Leesburg Fife and Drum Corps, Matt Buttery and Katie Bidinger, provided musical accompaniment and Hannah Torrance presented a reading of *The Beatitudes of a Family Genealogist* by Wilma Mauk. A reception followed the ceremony.

*Alexandra S. Gressitt, Library Manager*

## The Manager's View

We recently welcomed Pamela Russo and Roberta Savold to the staff of Thomas Balch library. Ms Russo is with us part time as a reference librarian. She has her MLS from SUNY at Albany and has worked in a variety of libraries in New York and Virginia, most recently as Librarian at the Winchester City Public School Library. She and her husband have purchased an early 1900's farmhouse and are having great fun renovating it and going antiquing to fill it with period pieces. Roberta Savold, also with us part time, is an office associate. Ms Savold recently completed her BLS at the University of Mary Washington. Her interests include competing in agility and rally obedience with her yellow Labrador retriever Gracie. She also volunteers with Fairfax Pets on Wheels and Therapy Dogs International.

The interior upper level of the original building has been repaired and painted. Vestiges of longstanding leaks have now disappeared. The interior upper level of the 2000 addition has been scheduled for repair of leak damage and painting during the coming fiscal year. Once again staff from Parks and Recreation is working magic with the lawns and gardens of Thomas Balch Library. To complement their efforts, following annual maintenance repairs, the fountain will be turned on.

The Black History Committee of the Friends received a grant from Loudoun Library Foundation to acquire the Wilbur H. Siebert Collection (1840-1954) Microfilm Edition, Ohio Historical Society. This collection has been received and is available for research use. A photocopy of the 146 page collection guide is available in the "Index to Microform Materials at Thomas Balch Library". Siebert, a distinguished scholar and historian, was an ardent student of the Underground Railroad. This collection consists of 16 rolls of microfilm and is a partial reproduction Series 1 and 6 and all of Series 4 of MSS 116AV Henry Wilbur Siebert Collection 1740-1860, Ohio Historical Society. The microfilm edition deals strictly with the Underground Railroad and does not represent any of Siebert's other research interests.

Earlier this spring the Friends voted to sponsor an entry for Thomas Balch Library in the forth-coming Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce coffee-table book – *Loudoun County-A Photographic Portrait*. The publishers, Riverbend Books, have been in communication with me, interior and exterior pictures have been taken and the text of our entry written and forwarded to the publishers. This is an exciting marketing opportunity for Thomas Balch Library and complements other marketing plans of the Friends. In addition, at several of our recent events we have had overflow audiences and insufficient chairs. So that we may provide capacity seating for 75 the Friends graciously purchased 10 additional chairs and a dolly.

Thank you for your continuing support.

*Alexandra S. Gressitt, Library Manager*

**Happy 84th Birthday to  
Thomas Balch Library  
Dedicated May 22, 1922**

## New and Renewing Members

Ethel L. Adams  
Elizabeth Balch Benckart  
Paul Bice  
Childs F. Burden  
Mark Burnette  
Terry & Sandy Eck  
June Francis  
Freelance Technologies, Inc.  
Tracy & Richard Gillespie  
Mason & Annie Hulen  
John & Joan Kelly  
Carol Kupchik  
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G. Shirley Myers  
George & Austin Miller  
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Joe & Juanita Pierson  
Mary Ann Polacek  
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Mr. & Mrs. S. Murray Rust, Jr.  
Wynne Saffer  
Reginald & Marion Simms  
Alice Jean Stine  
Rich & Sallie Vaaler & Family  
George & Susan Webber  
Karen Woltz  
Mrs. Mary Smalley Wood

## Elizabeth W. Seccombe

Members of the Friends, Advisory Commission and Library Staff were saddened by the death this year of longtime supporter of Thomas Balch Library, Elizabeth Welbourne Seccombe. "Betty," as she was called by many her friends, passed away on March 24. She had lived for many years in the 1752 house on Cornwall Street purchased in 1896 by her grandfather, Dr. Richard Baxter Fishburne. The front parlor of that home was his doctor's office and, at times, the library for Leesburg before Thomas Balch Library was built. She was a charter member of the Friends and continued as an active member until her death.

She will be most remembered for the sparkle in her eyes, her dedication and energy in supporting our heritage, and for her gracious manner.



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

**Friends of the  
 Thomas Balch Library, Inc.  
 invite you to join us!**

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

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Business/ Professional	\$ 35.00
Patron	\$ 50.00
Sustaining	\$100.00
Benefactor	\$250.00

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**Calendar of Events**

**June 9,10,11**  
**The Loudoun Sampler Guild Tea Party, Needlework Display, and Boutique**, Manor House at the Rust Audubon Sanctuary, Leesburg. **There will be two seatings for English Tea, 12:30 and 2:30.** Cost for the Tea, \$20.00.

For reservations, contact Betty Flemming, 703-777-2947.

**June 13 - 9 am**  
**Friends of the Thomas Balch Library Board Meeting**  
 The public is welcome.

**June 24- 2 pm**  
**Updating Our History: George Washington Carver & Billy Pierce.** Lemoine Pierce, retired attorney and author will speak. (The first of a series presented by the Black History Committee, Friends of the Thomas Balch Library.)

**Please join us as we look forward to the exciting and interesting programs planned for the fall.**

Programs sponsored by Thomas Balch Library are held in the downstairs meeting room and are free unless otherwise noted.

Due to limited seating we recommend registering in advance by calling 703/737-7195.