

THE HEADSTONE

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Issue XII

Hello and greetings to all!

The trees have shed their beautiful fall colors and most of us have set our faces toward winter. I have listened to a number of weather experts talking about what kind of winter we will have and I have concluded that we had better just look outside each morning that we are gifted with another day and get the official eyewitness report ourselves.

The Middlebrook Waltz

So last month I provided a short recap of the cemetery program that was provided to the Middlebrook Library with the walking field trip to the Middlebrook Cemetery that followed. The story of the Middlebrook Waltz is so much a result of the kind of small town that Middlebrook is that I wanted to share it with you all as well. The thing about small towns it seems to me is the fact that everything that happens, even insignificant events, can seem huge, good or bad, relatively speaking. And then there is the other problem with small towns, no one ever thinks that what is happening is important at all. Somewhere amongst these juxtaposed small-town traits the Middlebrook Waltz was discovered. Let me explain by sharing an article that historian and author Nancy Sorrells wrote in 2021 about the Middlebrook Waltz. Nancy has also been kind enough to share the photos and captions that help bring her article to life. Thank you Nancy.

Saving the Middlebrook Waltz

By Nancy Sorrells

Editor's Note: In April of 2021, the Augusta County History Society opened "Music & Miniatures of Note in the Valley" in the History Gallery of the R.R. Smith Center for History and Art. The exhibit featured the whimsical pairing of the region's musical story with miniature scenes from the Valley's past. The inspiration behind the musical portion of the display was the husband and wife duo of Don DePoy and Martha Hills, known as "Me & Martha, Music & Miniatures of Note in the Valley." Keeping Shenandoah Valley mountain music and other regional musical traditions alive is their goal.

The exhibit featured many of their instruments as well as interpretive signage about the many musical traditions of the Valley. Musical items from the Society's collections were also on display/

Interspersed among the musical history of the Valley were five miniature dioramas crafted by Greenville's Gary Whistleman. The miniature snapshots in area history featured Native American history, the blacksmith forge of Ned Tarr (the first African American landowner west of the Blue Ridge), a distilling scene, and one featuring "The Burning" – the 1864 devastation that the Union army visited upon the agricultural and industrial economy of the Valley.

The exhibit closed late in the summer of 2021. One of the interpretive panels in the music portion of the exhibit featured the story of the "Middlebrook Waltz. That information is preserved in this article.

If not for a chance encounter at a cakewalk, the sweet, lilting tune known as the “Middlebrook Waltz” would have been lost to history. There is a cast of characters involved in the saving of this short tune starting with the song’s composer, Millard Fillmore Fix (1855-1934).

We do not know much about Fix, beyond that he was from the Middlebrook area where he is variously listed in the census as a farm laborer, a house painter, and a gardener. Fix was apparently also a musician who probably played the fiddle. He is the man given credit for writing the “Middlebrook Waltz.” Fix died in 1934 but not before passing the tune along to the next generation of local musicians.

One of those “next generation” musicians was Marvin McCray (1919-1999) who lived most of his life in the Middlebrook and Walkers Creek area on the Rockbridge-Augusta County line. McCray was a fiddle player and, in the early 1990s, he was the last living person to know the “Middlebrook Waltz”. . . until the cakewalk fundraiser for the Walkers Creek Ruritans.

There was another family in the Middlebrook area that loved old-time music. Occasionally George Jarvis (guitar), his wife Pauline (who sang) and their son J.C. (fiddle) would show up and make music at area cakewalks. George (1932-1999) knew how to make music, literally, as he was known not just for his playing, but also for the beautiful banjos, dulcimers, and guitars that he crafted out of a variety of woods. After making an instrument, he took the leftover wood scraps and made miniature stringed instruments that were jewelry pins.



George Jarvis in his musical instrument workshop



Roberta Hamlin stands beside the gravestone of Millard Fillmore Fix, the man who started this story

The Jarvis family members were friends with Middlebrook resident Roberta Hamlin who played the autoharp and the dulcimer. One night, the Jarvis family was scheduled to play at a Walkers Creek cakewalk. Just before the event, word arrived that the elderly Marvin McCray would also be at the cakewalk, so George and Roberta took their cassette tape recorders to the event to record Marvin playing the “Middlebrook Waltz.” Despite the fact that he had suffered a stroke, Marvin was able to play the tune and pass down the story about the composer Millard Fillmore Fix, whom he said was buried in the Middlebrook graveyard. The burial ground, located just a few doors down from where Roberta lives in the village’s old brick tavern, was once the cemetery to a Union Church that is no longer standing. Roberta took her recording to a dulcimer workshop at the Augusta Heritage Center at Davis and Elkins College in West Virginia where the instructor, Tull Glazner, helped her work it up for the dulcimer. Feeling like the

“Middlebrook Waltz” should be preserved, Roberta and her friend Nancy Sorrells took the cassette recording to Middlebrook folk musicians Robin and Linda Williams in 2001. The musical duo took the waltz, which has no words, and placed it onto the end of another one of their songs about Middlebrook, “Green Summertime.” The “Green Summertime-Middlebrook Waltz” version was included on their 2013 album, Back 40.

The final step in ensuring that the song would not once again nearly disappear from history came in 2021 when musician Richard Adams created sheet music and a digital recording for the waltz. It has taken nearly 30 years, but thanks to a cakewalk, and a handful of dedicated folks, the "Middlebrook Waltz" has earned a never-to-be-forgotten spot in the musical history of Augusta County.

Millard Fillmore Fix is a descendant and relative of just about all of the Fix's that are recorded as ever living in the southern Augusta-northern Rockbridge County area. For the musically inclined, I have attached the sheet music below.



Robin & Linda Williams play some music at the Middlebrook Library

The Middlebrook Waltz

Millard Fillmore Fix

And now for the best part! I have attached a link below to the YouTube Video of Middlebrook Folk Musicians Robin and Linda Williams. The Middlebrook Waltz immediately follows their song, The Green Summertime. The Middlebrook Waltz begins at 3:57 into the recording but I strongly encourage you to listen to Green Summertime as well. I can't help but think that Millard might just have put the Middlebrook Waltz together especially for cakewalk music. Locally, cakewalks are still a popular way to raise money for charitable events. Enjoy the music.

[Green Summertime and The Middlebrook Waltz](#)

If you took a liking to Robin and Linda's music, I implore you to listen to just one more. The link is below. I don't think you will regret doing so. I also

encourage you to read a few of the listener responses to this song on YouTube as it plays. Email me your thoughts on all of this. I have to believe it made you have some. It sure did me.

[The Old Lovers Waltz](#)

Whitecaps in Middlebrook

I wrote a short piece in the September issue of *The Headstone* about Whitecaps. I had never heard of Whitecaps prior to stumbling across an article in *The Freeport Journal-Standard*, a newspaper published in Freeport, Illinois while doing some unrelated research. The simple definition for Whitecaps would be something to the effect of “a vigilante civilian group who through group aggression attempts to regulate or correct what they consider violations of social norms.” Therein dwelt the real issue with this group. Their “enforcement” was based on what they considered to be social norms.

Fast forward one month. While doing some research on the town of Middlebrook, Virginia I found that during the late 1800s we too had a problem with Whitecaps. The first article I accidentally stumbled upon was written in a weekly column of the era called simply “Middlebrook Items.”

I decided to do a little more digging just to see if this was really an issue locally during the late 1800s. Below is a little of what I found.

The white caps have created quite an excitement among the “colored brethren.”

March 22, 1889 - Staunton, Va²

At Strasburg, Va., during the holidays, twenty-two “white caps” rode into the town, took several of the inmates of a disreputable house out, gave them a severe lashing, and ordered them to leave town. They left.

January 17, 1890 - Strasburg, Va³

I found about fifty or so local articles related to White Caps, almost all from the late 1880s with several articles even refuting the existence of such a group. I choose not to cite or investigate any further on the matter. I think we get the picture. As if the war and slavery weren’t bad enough.

Quite a number of wild and irresponsible young men called “White Caps,” have been raiding around here for some time, under the pretence of stopping theft and other immoral habits. But we believe in the old proverb, that “charity begins at home.” This is no political band, as I first thought, and wrote last week. It is too low for the respectability of either party, but they can prepare to answer the Grand Jury at its next meeting.
Mr. Samuel B. Bowers is erecting a new barn on his farm near this place.
W. H. W.

March 14, 1889 - Middlebrook, Va¹

The White Caps are reported to be active in this neighborhood, and much illegitimate association has been broken up. Some receiving notices of dire consequences if they did not immediately abandon their unlawful pursuits, while many others without waiting for the nocturnal warning in dread alarm, hastened to the nearest minister, and had the legal knot tied in due form, who for years had lived in open contempt of the laws of the land. Whether there really have been any White Caps here is not definitely known, but the simple report of their presence has been a great moral power in suppressing evil.

A negro, by the name of Brown, drew his gun upon Wm. Blackwell, a white boy, accusing him of being a White Cap and one of the party at his house the night before. A warrant for his arrest is now in the hands of the constable, Newton Wats, but up to date he has averted the officer.

CAROLUS VULPES.

March 28, 1889 - Crimora Va⁴

Cemetery Visitors

I had the distinct pleasure of meeting with some descendants of George Lotts (1742-1845) who is, according to his obituary, buried in Dutch Hollow Hanger Cemetery, but to this point a headstone for him has not been located. The descendant is Dennis Lotts who had with him his wife Rachel and their son-in-law. Dennis and Rachel live in Washington State on the east side of the divide and their son-in-law and daughter live in North Carolina. While they did not make the trip from Washington just to visit the cemetery, they did take the time while here to make the trip from Rockbridge County where Dennis's father still lives to see Dutch Hollow. It was a great visit for me as well and Rachel and I have been emailing a few things back and forth concerning what we know (and don't know) about the Lotts family. She also had some pictures from 2005 when they were here at the cemetery which she shared with me. While all of the stones were already dislodged, scattered, broken, and buried by then, the cemetery had a lot less vegetation. That is because the cattle on the same farm as the cemetery were still grazing it. I have a couple of her pictures below as well as one of Dennis and Rachel. It was a good visit, and her cemetery photos are a good reminder of just how quickly a neglected cemetery can fall victim to the ravages of time. Thank you Dennis and Rachel for taking the time to see the cemetery. More visitor reports in next month's issue - Courtney - All the way from Oklahoma!



Looking east from about the center of the cemetery. There are now approx. twenty headstones reset in this same view.



Looking west from about the center of the cemetery. Not a headstone in sight! But we found them.



Dennis & Rachel Lotts - November 11, 2025

Cemetery Ridge Films

While searching for something that was of the utmost importance that I can already not remember, I stumbled upon a most interesting concept for documenting cemeteries. It is a Find A Grave member who videos cemeteries. Not just easy to get to cemeteries, but ones well off the beaten path and throughout Virginia as well. While Dutch Hollow Hanger Cemetery is one that has not been video recorded, over 700 other cemeteries have. Using the link below you can access the page that lists the counties in Virginia and then click on the county of choice, then click on the cemetery of choice. It is a unique method for documenting cemeteries. I hope you find it as interesting as I did.

[Cemetery Ridge Films](#)

DAR/ SAR Marking of a Patriot Grave

The flyer below is to announce well in advance the first DAR marking of a Revolutionary War Patriot in Rockbridge County in over fifty years. James Logan McKee's 5th great grandson of Sacramento, California designed the flyer, and everyone is invited to attend the ceremony.

McKee Cemetery recently underwent extensive preservation under the guidance of Pauline McKee and many volunteers. GPR was performed by Len Strozier, owner of Omega Mapping, who we used at Dutch Hollow. Pauline has also employed a professional preservationist to repair each stone.

A number of those buried in McKee were killed in the two Kerr's (Pronounced Car's) Creek Massacres in 1759 and 1763. The attack at Kerr's Creek in 1763 was preceded by Chief Cornstalk and his warriors attacking the Clendenin Settlement and the Settlement at Muddy Creek. Frederick and Peter Hanger both obtained land grants on Muddy Creek in 1751 & 1752 and while there is no evidence that either Hanger lived in West Virginia or even visited the land they obtained, there are many Hangers both buried in and still living in Greenbrier County, West Virginia in the area of Muddy Creek. I can state that John Hanger (1855-1935) married Nancy Clendenin (1858-1949). This John was my 2nd cousin 3 times removed and Nancy was the 3rd great granddaughter of Charles Clendenin (1712-1790), founder of the city named after him, Charleston, West Virginia.

I have included an overview of the massacres at Kerr's Creek below. This is information from Werelate.org and I have attached the link for anyone that would like to learn more about how the French used Native Americans in their battles against the British over land in the Ohio and Tennessee Valleys. Unfortunately, the British were using colonists just as equally to battle the French for the same piece of America. [Kerr's Creek Massacres](#)

For those that may not routinely delve too deeply into the colonial period, the We Relate article⁵ below is a good way to get an overview of the events at Kerr's Creek in my opinion. There are many other sources that expound to the greatest of detail if you are interested. As a side note, the militia men that were accused of murdering Cornstalk, his son Elinipsico, and two others while they were being held as prisoners at Fort Randolph at Point Pleasant, West Virginia were to be tried in Rockbridge County. The charges were dismissed, essentially because the witnesses

⁵ https://www.werelate.org/wiki/The_Kerr%27s_Creek_Massacres_%281759-1763%29. Retrieved October 18, 2025.

the commonwealth needed to testify against the men “could not be found” to be served with a subpoena to appear. Another interesting account of history if you choose to dig a little deeper.

First Massacre

In the fall of 1759, the two Telford boys walked home, possibly from school. Their walk turned into a run. Breathless, they told of a naked man they saw hiding behind a tree. No one thought twice about their tale until later. Several weeks passed. The trees topping North Mountain and House Mountain bled down the hillsides in red and gold, as a party of 60 Shawnee warriors followed their chief, Cornstalk, from the Ohio. Winding through the mountains, they split outside the Greenbrier settlements. Acting friendly, the larger band worked their way down the Greenbrier, gaining the settlers' confidence before attacking and killing most of them.

From what is now Millboro in Bath County, 27 of the warriors slipped over Mill Mountain about two miles north of the present Midland Trail near where Interstate 64 now cuts toward Clifton Forge. A pile of stones said to be placed there by Indian warriors through the years marked the mountaintop. The stones were dozed away with the building of 64. Workers hoping to find graves or artifacts under the rock pile were disappointed. Near the head of the creek atop a bluff, Robert Irvine scarcely breathed as he counted the war party on the trail.

At the first cabin along the creek at present day Denmark, Charles Daugherty (husband of Rebecca Cunningham) and his family was killed (Note: other sources indicate that Charles Daugherty was killed in the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre). Next was the Jacob Cunningham cabin. With Cunningham away, his wife was killed, his 10-year old daughter knocked unconscious and scalped. She later came to and survived to face the Indians a second time on Kerr's Creek. Next came the home of Thomas Gilmore, the elderly Gilmore and his wife were leaving to visit a neighbor when they were killed and scalped. The rest of the Gilmores escaped. Five of the ten members of the Robert Hamilton family next fell victim. By that time, the community was alerted to the danger, with residents scrambling for safety everywhere.

Site of 1st Kerr's Creek Massacre

Harry Swisher, who owns the old Laird homestead that previously was the McKee farm, says the old log cabin still exists under the clapboards of a renovated 1910 farmhouse. “The logs are huge,” Swisher says, spreading his arms to illustrate early log construction. When he and his family remodeled the old house, they discovered the central log portion. With two rooms up and down, a shallow fireplace and a ladder to a loft, the cabin appeared easily fortified. A small window between the floors allows a view of the hillside behind, and Swisher says from the round top of the hill, the entire valley, with Big Spring, is visible. “I remember my dad saying survivors scrambled up that hill where they could see where the Indians were going. They could hide there,” Swisher says. Since the house is up a hollow where U.S. 60 now comes from Lexington, Swisher believes the old house could be the McKee home spoken of in the raid stories.

John and Jane, or "Jennie" (Logan) McKee had six children whom they'd sent to Timber Ridge for safekeeping. When the alarm sounded through the neighborhood, the McKee's fled their home (one account says up a wooded hillside in back, agreeing with Swisher's father's story). One account says their barking dog gave them away, another said a black servant sounded the alarm with her cries of fright. Mrs.

McKee could not run quickly (one account says she expected a child) and John had left the house without his gun. As the Indian pursuit neared the McKee's, Jenny begged John to run on. "Otherwise, our children will have no parents." It's said McKee paused, helping his wife to hide in a sink hole on the Hamilton farm. His parting words were "God bless you, Jinney." It's also said as he looked back from his race, he saw the tomahawk fell his wife. With Indians almost close enough to catch him, and encouraged by his wife's sacrifice, he bounded on. When the Indians gave up chasing him, McKee hid until dark when he returned to find his wife. She lay in the sink hole, having survived long enough to wrap her kerchief around her head wound. He buried her where she lay and wrote her name in the family Bible. John McKee lived to rear his motherless children whose descendants were numerous along Kerrs Creek and in westward expansion. Another account, published in "The McKees of Virginia and Kentucky," related John was at a neighbors tending to some sick children. When he returned home, he found his wife killed and scalped.

The settlers listed in the cemetery records as killed in the first raid on Oct. 10, 1759, and possibly interred in the McKee Cemetery near Big Spring are: Isaac Cunningham, Jacob Cunningham (son of James and Mattie), the Charles Dougherty family, four of the John Gilmore family, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Gilmore (Note: Thomas Gilmore and his wife actually were killed in the second raid on Kerr's Creek), Gray (no first name listed), five Robert Hamilton family members, James McKee (McGee), Alexander McMurty, Robert Ramsey, James Stephenson, Thomas Thompson, Samuel Wilson and John Winyard. Since most accounts stress that no captives were taken on Kerrs Creek during the first raid and many men were killed, perhaps many of the men took a stand while their families escaped.

Charles Lewis of the Cowpasture raised three companies of militia (about 150 men). Charles Lewis led one company, John Dickenson and William Christian headed the other two. These three companies of militia went after the Indian warriors. They overtook the tribesmen near the head of Back Creek in Highland County. The Captains decided to attack at three points. Two white scouts were sent ahead as an advance. They were ordered to shoot if the enemy realized the soldiers were nearby. The scouts came upon two braves, one leading a horse, the other holding a buck across the back of the horse. In an attempt to get the upper hand, the scouts fired and Christian's company charged with a yell. The other companies were still miles behind the advance group. The Indians escaped with very little loss. The militia companies caught up with the Shawnee at Straight Fork, four miles below the present West Virginia line, their campfires revealed their location. About twenty Indians were killed. The booty they were carrying was retaken and sold for \$1200.00. Thomas Young was the only white man killed, and Captain Dickenson was wounded. (Source: *The Weekender*, Lexington, Virginia (December 6, 1997), p. 1, pp. 4-5.)

Scarcely had the treaty (Treaty of Paris) ink dried before a powerful Ottawa chief named Pontiac began uniting the tribes throughout the Ohio. Said to have been instrumental in Braddock's defeat near the opening of the French and Indian War, Pontiac had become a brilliant strategist who realized that without a united front the Native Americans were doomed. In a short time, he'd recruited from all the tribes from Lake Superior to Mexico. Each tribe in the confederation was to choose its best warriors. In May, 1763, the warriors were to attack 14 British garrisons along the frontier. Of those 14, all but four were captured. One of the four was Detroit, Pontiac's personal goal. That summer, war raged up and down the frontier. Once again, the Shawnee Chief Cornstalk was assigned the area he knew well, the

eastern Alleghanies, the Cowpasture and Jackson rivers, Botetourt, Kerrs Creek, Augusta. Small forts dotted the frontier from the French and Indian War. A confident Cornstalk knew he could take them all.

As the warriors gathered supplies and weaponry and set their faces south and east, the Kerrs Creek farmers broke ground for the '63 season. They'd rebuilt the last cabins burned in 1759. Families stowed empty chairs in lofts or along walls, and realized the frontier belonged to the living. In the little cemetery overlooking the spring, mounded graves sank level with the thick grass. But in many cabins, visions of death and destruction still replayed in the dark, woke children, sent shivers through the stoutest settler. June greened the young crops. July scattered fireflies among the trees at the edges of farm clearings. Nights hummed with cicadas.

Atop North Mountain again, Cornstalk's warriors lounged beside a spring and watched the comings and goings in the valley. Some historians believe they were waiting reinforcements. The final total of warriors is estimated between 40 and 60. Someone from the settlement saw moccasin tracks in a cornfield and told everyone what he found. Next, a hunter spied the Indian encampment from the top of a hill and rushed to spread the alarm. That's when the warriors swooped toward Big Spring.

Massacre at Muddy Creek, Prelude to 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre:

The massacre on Muddy Creek in 1763, which occurred just prior to the 2nd Kerr's Creek Massacre, completely destroyed one of Greenbriers' first settlements. A stone marker in a field on a hill marks the site of the massacre. Frederick See's name, spelled "Sea" is listed. The graves of the victims may still be seen in what is known as the McKee burying ground. In 1772 a lone man, Samuel McKinney, built his cabin near this tragic spot. Others soon followed and two years later there were enough settlers to warrant the building of Fort Arbuckle on Muddy Creek for their protection.

When the Shawnee Indians attacked Settlement of Archd. Clendenning (Clendenin), (who was killed along with two of his sons) and Muddy Creek Settlements they also killed John Williams and took [his wife] Mary, Nancy (age four) and David (age two) captive to their villages on Scioto River in Ohio. Thomas, Richard and John were not at home and escaped captivity or death. [Greenbrier County, West Virginia Heritage, S. Grose, pg. 183].

After the massacre at Muddy Creek "they (the Indians under Chief Cornstalk) proceeded to the Big Levels, and on the next day, after having been as hospitably entertained as at Muddy Creek, they reenacted the revolting scenes of the previous day. Every white man in the settlement but Conrad Yolkom, who was some distance from his house, was slain, and every woman but Mrs. Clendinin. Yolkom, when alarmed by the outcries of the women, took in the situation and fled to Jackson's River telling the story.

The people were unwilling to believe him, till convinced by the approach of the Indians. All fled before them, and they pursued on to Carr's Creek in Rockbridge, where many families were murdered and others captured." [Source: Narrative of John Stuart 1798 in WMQ Vol 22 No 4 Apr 1914].

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All fled before them, and they pursued on to Carr's Creek in [then Augusta, current Rockbridge County], where many families were murdered and others captured. [Source: History of Augusta County, Virginia, pg. 138]

Second Kerr's Creek Massacre:

July 17, a Sunday, marked special meetings at the Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church. Many of the settlers had traveled there. But other accounts say the special church meeting was at Jonathan Cunningham's cabin. Still others say the settlers had fled to Cunninghams and were saddling horses and organizing a flight to Timber Ridge where the men carried their guns to church. No one knows for sure, but other than the McKee cabin, which could have been attacked first, the Shawnees seemed intent on the Big Spring farm.

William Gilmore and another man turned toward the mountains to scout for Indians. Concealed nearby, the Indians shot the two men, and swooped upon the nearly 100 men, women and children milling around. Two or three younger men advanced toward the enemy and lost their lives immediately. In one account, when the Shawnees sprang from cover, Mrs. Dale grabbed a stud colt that had never been ridden and swung onto its back. Managing to balance her baby and cling to the horse, she fled the pursuing Indians. Out running them, she dropped her baby in a rye field and hid herself in the brush, obviously sending the horse on. Later, she returned and found the baby unharmed in the rye.

She said the terror-stricken people ran in every direction, trying to hide. The Indians chased first one, then another, killing everyone in their path. Another account says even the cattle were shot, bristling with arrows. Mrs. Dale recounts that some people threw up their hands, entreating for mercy. The Shawnees killed most, spared some. Any man resisting was shot immediately. Some whites fled for the spring pond, hiding both in the water and in the weeds along the banks. The warriors found them, killed them and tossed the bodies in the pond.

Thomas Gilmore had died defending his family. His wife, Jenny, stood over his body, grappling with a tomahawk-wielding Indian. When a second ran up to kill her, the first threw up his hand, sparing her life for her bravery. She was led off, with her son James, and two daughters, into captivity. Although some reports claim that before torching the Cunningham cabin, the Shawnees killed Jonathan Cunningham and his wife, Jonathan's will written in 1769, naming his wife Mary, clearly contradicts those reports. Cunningham had a distillery, and the Shawnees carried off all the whiskey they could find. Margaret Cunningham, (Jacob's daughter) the 10-year-old girl who survived scalping in the first raid, was captured along with James, Betsy and Henry Cunningham. One account says when she arrived at the Shawnee town, a warrior brought out a scalp and sat it on her head, communicating that it was her hair.

Also taken were Archibald, Mary and Marian Hamilton. Another account, however, says Mary Hamilton was among the dead. When her fiancé John McCown discovered her body, he went into a depression and died two years later of a broken heart. His family buried him beside her on the little hillside in the McKee cemetery. Another account says Mary Hamilton had a baby in her arms when captured. She dropped it in the weeds, and later, when she was ransomed and returned home, she found its bones.

During the church service at Timber Ridge, rumor was given of trouble at Big Spring, but in an age of slow communications, rumors often were disregarded. When someone else rushed breathlessly into the service and told of the raid, the settlers rushed about gathering family and friends. Many fled into the Blue Ridge Mountains, since no one knew where the Shawnees might hit next.

One account says the Indians paused for the night at the spring near the head of Kerrs Creek where they had been camped. There the prisoners spent the night listening for rescuers. After drinking Cunningham's whiskey, the war party would have offered little resistance to a rescue party, but the area had been thrown into so much confusion no militia was raised at that time. The next day, William Patton and others ventured to the Big Spring to bury the dead. They were attacked by Indians, but Mrs. Dale said one of the burial party rode up the valley, and a small party of Indians shot at him.

The Shawnees marched their captives toward the Ohio. Those later returned told of the march, during which one fretful infant was killed and thrown on the shoulders of a girl. She was killed the next day. Another infant was impaled on a spear and left as a threat to pursuers as the captives walked on. The afternoon of the massacre, the Indians returned to their camp on North Mountain. They sat around and drank the whiskey they had stolen from Cunningham's still. They became so intoxicated they could have put up little resistance. There was little to fear, most of Rockbridge was in a panic. On the following day, two Indians went back, either to see if they were being followed, or to look for more whiskey. Mrs. Dale saw them shoot at a man as he rode up the valley. The man wheeled his horse and the Indians clapped their hands and shouted.

At one of the encampments, some of the prisoners found some leaves of a New Testament, and being anxious to preserve them, were drying them at the fire, when one of the Indians snatched them up and threw them in the fire, no doubt thinking they were some communication which they wished to send home. However, a few days later, Jenny Gilmore was asked to sing a hymn. She chose Psalm 137, singing

"On Babel's stream we sat and wept, When Zion we thought on, In midst thereof we hanged our harps, The willow trees thereon; For then a song requested they, Who did us captive bring, Our spoilers called for mirth, and said A song of Zion sing."

Numerous captives from the Cowpasture (Bath and Highland County areas) were brought as more returning Shawnees swelled their ranks with plunder. (Source: *When Blood Flowed In Kerrs Creek*, By Deborah Sensabaugh) The graves of the victims of this massacre may still be seen in what is known as the "McKee burying ground," near Big Spring, about seven miles north of Lexington, Virginia. (Source: *Cornstalk the Shawnee, Chronicles of Oklahoma, Volume 9, No. 1, March, 1931*, By Dr. W. B. Morrison)

Pauline McKee is the 5th great granddaughter of John and Jane "Jennie" Logan McKee. If you recall from the story, John and Jennie attempted to flee the attack, and being gained upon, John helped a possibly pregnant Jennie hide in a sinkhole and John continued to run, with Jennie being discovered and killed.

Mark your 2026 calendars now to attend this wonderful event.

Membership Renewal

If your membership renewal has lapsed or is due soon, please take the time to renew. If there is something we are not doing that would make that decision easier, please let me know and I will try to correct the problem. Everyone has been so generous about their giving and I truly appreciated it, to the point that I don't even like giving reminders about membership, but we are all the cemetery has!

The Natural Bridge–Frontier Chapter

*National Society of the
Daughters of the American Revolution*

in conjunction with

*Virginia Society, Sons of the
American Revolution Color Guard*

invites you to attend:

Grave Marking Ceremony
in honor of

Revolutionary War Patriot
Ensign James Logan McKee

Tuesday, June 23, 2026 · 10:00 a.m.

Historic McKee / Big Spring Cemetery
Big Spring Farm
104 Fredericksburg Road Lexington, Virginia 24550

Kindly reply by April 1, 2026

Garnette Teass, Chapter Regent · garnetteteass@gmail.com
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Questions? Call 336-328-5507

Okay, if you survived the article from last month's newsletter about boiled turkeys for Thanksgiving, this story should be fairly "palatable as well." It is information from the Hottel-Keller website which houses the Shenandoah Germanic Heritage Museum. These are family names that many of you might recognize in your own ancestral line. As for me, Hans George Keller (1711-1782) married Barbara Anna Hottel (1713-1798) Their son George Keller (1732-1816) married Anna Barbara Hanger (1736-1782). She was my 5th great grand aunt, sister of my 5g grandfather, Johann Frederick Hanger. Enjoy the article.⁶

Christmas Traditions of the Shenandoah Valley Dutch

The "holding of the day" by the people known as the Valley Dutch was based on several variables: the era, their socio-economic background and their religious affiliation.

In the eighteenth century, Christmas day was a meager celebration in comparison to today. There was no Christmas tree; no exchanging of Christmas gifts; and no singing of Christmas carols, as the majority of these hymns were unknown to the Valley Dutch. What did make Christmas day special was fresh meat for the dinner table. Right before Christmas is when the butchering was done. The weather was cold and there was less chance of the meat spoiling. If the family was a member of the Lutheran or Reformed church, the children could expect a visit from the Belsnickle. The Belsnickle was not Santa Claus! He was ugly and he frightened the children. The Belsnickle traveled from house to house brandishing his switches in the air. He would use these switches to whip naughty children. To good children the Belsnickle would hand out cakes or candies. It was the custom for the Belsnickle to receive a treat at each house. This was usually in the form of a libation. Needless to say, as the Belsnickle proceeded on this visits, he became more and more oblivious to his behavior and the severity of his whippings. One informant told me this story: her great-aunt was three years old the Christmas the Belsnickle came to visit. She was so terrified of the ugly figure that she ran and hid under a bed. The Belsnickle followed, reached under the bed and pulled her out. Her mouth was drawn to one side in terror, a condition that remained permanent. The Custom of the Christmas visit from the Belsnickle slowly faded into the past.

The end of the seventeen hundreds found many religious leaders concerned with the increasing popularity of the "Manger Cult." Wooden cradles with figures of baby Jesus were being placed in Christian churches where they would be rocked and tenderly sung to. The ministers feared this was dangerously close to the worshiping of idols.

By the mid-nineteenth century the Germanic people had for the most part been absorbed into the Anglo community, adopting their architecture, language and customs. Christmas day was spent feasting, drinking, playing and exchanging gifts. The Dunker minister Daniel Miller preached his 1844 Christmas sermon on the practice of gift-giving: "If presents are made on this day with an eye to the gift of God's love, they will be accepted in his eye, but if given to comply with custom or fashion they have no meaning." The Second Christmas (the day after Christmas) was reserved for more secular activities such as visiting. The first Christmas tree in the Shenandoah Valley was erected in 1855. Frank Prufer, a recent immigrant from Germany, caused quite a sensation in Staunton with his decorated tree. With the demise of the Belsnickle, a new custom emerged that lasted well into the twentieth century, Kris Kringling, or Belsnickling. On Christmas night groups of people either walking, riding in sleighs or on horseback, would visit the homes in the neighborhood. They all wore costumes and their faces were concealed. Bells ringing and horns blowing would announce their arrival to each household. "Open your door and welcome the Belsnicklers." The Belsnicklers would be invited into the house where they would play

⁶ <https://www.hottelkeller.org/wp/home/museum/page-from-the-past/christmas-traditions-of-the-shenandoah-valley-dutch>. Retrieved Nov. 19, 2025.

pranks, dance around, joke and carry on until they were offered some refreshments. Before leaving, the Belsnicklers would give the children of the house small treats such as sticks of candy and oranges. If the members of the family had been unable to identify all the Belsnicklers, the unknown ones would remove their masks before they left. Belsnickling was done just for the sheer fun of it. One of my informant's grandmothers made costumes for Belsnickling for fifty cents. These costumes were known as "Santy-suits" and she described them as being clown-like; purchased or home-make. Sometimes a flour or paper sack was used for a mask.

During the early part of the twentieth century, Christmas trees were cut down and erected in almost every house. Ornaments were "store-bought" or homemade (stars and dolls cut out of paper, bells made from tissue paper, and swags made of twisted red and green crepe paper.) Christmas presents for the most part were meager. All the families had country ham for dinner and several different types of pies. In the more affluent homes, fruitcake and eggnog was served. Some of the special things associated only with Christmas were: oranges, raisins on a bunch, candy (peanut brittle, a hard mixture and chocolate drops), roasted peanuts and chestnuts, black walnuts, the visit of the Belsnicklers and the setting off of firecrackers. Researched by: Gae G. Ward

So much for those Belsnicklers! Last but not least, possibly everything you ever wanted to know about the history of the Christmas Tree. It is a compilation of information found in the online version of Britannica.

How Did the Tradition of Christmas Trees Start?⁷

Christmas has numerous traditions, of which perhaps none is more popular than a decorated tree. Whether real or artificial, Christmas trees are synonymous with the holiday. But how did trees become part of Christmas?

Trees have been used in rituals and as decorations since ancient times, thus making the source of the modern Christmas tree open to debate. However, many believe that it originated in Germany. It is claimed that in Germany about 723 the English missionary St. Boniface encountered pagans preparing a sacrifice at an oak tree dedicated to the god Thor (Donar). Boniface took an ax to the tree, and, when not struck down by their god, he proclaimed to the awed pagans that a nearby evergreen was their "holy tree." Other sources report that a fir grew on the site of the fallen oak.

Whether that tale is true or not, evergreen trees became part of Christian rites in Germany, and in the Middle Ages "paradise trees" began to appear there. Meant to represent the Garden of Eden, these evergreen trees were hung with apples and displayed in homes on December 24, the religious feast day of Adam and Eve. Other decorations were added – Martin Luther reportedly first hung lighted candles on a tree in the 16th century – and paradise trees evolved into Christmas trees. By the 19th century, Christmas trees were a firmly established tradition in Germany.

As Germans migrated, they took Christmas trees to other countries, notably England. There, in the 1790s, Charlotte, the German-born wife of King George III, had trees decorated for the holiday. However, it was a German-born prince, Albert, and his wife, Britain's Queen Victoria, who popularized the tradition among the British. The couple made Christmas trees a prominent part of the holiday's festivities, and in 1848 an illustration of the royal family around a decorated tree appeared in a London newspaper. Christmas trees soon became common in English homes.

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/plant/Christmas-tree>. Retrieved November 20, 2025.

German settlers also introduced Christmas trees in the United States, though the custom was not initially embraced. Many Puritans opposed the holiday because of its pagan roots, and officials of the Massachusetts Bay Colony actually outlawed celebrating Christmas. Their dislike of the holiday was such that they even closed their churches on December 25. It wasn't until the 1820s that Christmas began gaining popularity in America, and the country's first Christmas tree reportedly was displayed in the 1830s. The Christmas tree's popularity spread with the help of the influential magazine Godey's Lady's Book, which in 1850 published the 1848 illustration of the British royals, though the depiction of the family was altered to appear American. This and other efforts helped make Christmas trees popular in the United States by the 1870s.

Christmas trees spread around the world, but the tradition began to have a detrimental impact on forests, especially in Germany. As a result, Germans began making artificial goose-feather trees in the 1880s. These trees found their way to different countries, and over time the goose feathers were replaced by other materials. A notable development occurred in the 1930s, when a manufacturer of toilet bowl brushes allegedly used surplus product to create an artificial tree. These bristle trees gained in popularity but were later supplanted by aluminum and then plastic versions. In the United States, 84 percent of Christmas trees displayed by households in 2021 were artificial, according to data from the American Christmas Tree Association, while 16 percent were live.

Christmas tree, an evergreen tree, often a pine, spruce, or fir, decorated with lights and ornaments as a part of Christmas festivities. Christmas trees can be fresh-cut, potted, or artificial and are used as both indoor and outdoor decorations. While the trees are traditionally associated with Christian symbolism, their modern use is largely secular. Many families place presents around an indoor Christmas tree to be opened on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

The use of evergreen trees, wreaths, and garlands to symbolize eternal life was a custom of the ancient Egyptians, Chinese, and Hebrews. Tree worship was common among the pagan Europeans and survived their conversion to Christianity in the Scandinavian customs of decorating the house and barn with evergreens at the New Year to scare away the Devil and of setting up a tree for the birds during Christmastime. It survived further in the custom, also observed in Germany, of placing a Yule tree at an entrance or inside the house during the midwinter holidays.

The modern Christmas tree, though, originated in western Germany. The main prop of a popular medieval play about Adam and Eve was a "paradise tree," a fir tree hung with apples, that represented the Garden of Eden. The Germans set up a paradise tree in their homes on December 24, the religious feast day of Adam and Eve. They hung wafers on it (symbolizing the eucharistic host, the Christian sign of redemption); in a later tradition the wafers were replaced by cookies of various shapes. Candles, symbolic of Christ as the light of the world, were often added. In the same room was the "Christmas pyramid," a triangular construction of wood that had shelves to hold Christmas figurines and was decorated with evergreens, candles, and a star. By the 16th century the Christmas pyramid and the paradise tree had merged, becoming the Christmas tree.

The custom was widespread among the German Lutherans by the 18th century, but it was not until the following century that the Christmas tree became a deep-rooted German tradition. Introduced into England in the early 19th century, the Christmas tree was popularized in the mid-19th century by German-born Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria. The Victorian tree was decorated with toys and small gifts, candles, candies, popcorn strings, and fancy cakes hung from the branches by ribbons and by paper chains. Taken to North America by German settlers as early as the 17th century, Christmas trees were the height of fashion by the 19th century. They were also popular in Austria, Switzerland, Poland,

and the Netherlands. In China and Japan, Christmas trees, introduced by Western missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries, were decorated with intricate paper designs.

Blown-glass ornaments were offered for sale in Britain and the United States as early as the 1870s, many produced in small workshops in Germany and Bohemia, which also created decorations made from tinsel, cast lead, beads, pressed paper, and cotton batting. In the United States, F.W. Woolworth was selling \$25 million in ornaments annually by 1890, by which time strings of electric tree lights were also available. In the 1930s, artificial trees made of brush bristles were developed in the United States, and the 1950s and '60s saw the mass production of aluminum and PVC plastic trees. Artificial trees gained significant popularity, particularly in countries where fresh trees were hard to procure.

One last note regarding the Christmas season to those ethnically oriented cooks and connoisseurs of ethnic food. If you have a hankering for German foods, anything from ingredients to candies, check out the link below. I highly recommend Marzipan Stollen! Now, about that long winter's nap..... Merry Christmas everyone! [The German Grocery Store](#)

Augusta County Genealogical Society Programs Slated For This Winter

The Board of Directors at The Augusta County Genealogical Society are once again ramping up for a great year ahead for speakers to present at the monthly meetings. Please plan to attend these presentations if you can and if you live too far to make attendance possible, don't forget you can always "attend" using Zoom. I can attest that every time I can catch one of their presentations I never go away without having learned something new.

ACGS Planned Programs

- **Wednesday, January 21, 2026 Regular Meeting ~ 1:00 PM**
 - Speaker: Barbara Price & Cathi Clore Frost, Authors & Genealogists
 - Topic: *"What is Historic Germanna?"*
- **Wednesday, February 18, 2026 Regular Meeting ~ 1:00 PM**
 - Speaker: Lynn Coffey, Author
 - Topic: *"History of Love, Virginia"*
- **Wednesday, March 18, 2026 Regular Meeting ~ 1:00 PM**
 - Speaker: Sam Towler, Historical Researcher
 - Topic: *"Family & Land Title Research from the Rockfish Gap to Waynesboro"*

Website Updates: Members Section

LIFE MEMBERS

Al Wilkerson 2025 Glenn Hanger 2025 Crim Lotts 2025

In The Library / Archives Section

Ship Passenger Lists 1732-1754 - 15 Total

Unpublished Documents - 9 Total

Published Documents - 11 Total

Life in Dutch Hollow - 209 Total

Obituaries & Death Notices - 1162 Total (Still several hundred, thousand to go)

Lucas-Fix Private Collection 109 Total

Department of Historical Resources Augusta County Archaeological Site Surveys - 16

Deed Histories - Dutch Hollow - 5

DHH Cemetery Forensics, Etc. - Preliminary Findings of Ground Penetrating Radar for lower 35 feet of Cemetery and GPS of entire cemetery - 2

Frederich Hanger Descendants Over 200 pages of his descendants' names with city, county, and state of residence when known. Roughly 8,000 names.

Cook-Teaford Cemetery - 2 Files

Schoolhouses-Augusta Co. - 1800s - 39

Marriages - 150

Coming Soon:

Elijah Jacob Hanger Private Collection (Approximately 450 files to be uploaded as time permits)

In The Focused Research Section

18 Files (40+ more to be researched, formatted, and uploaded as time permits)

The **Miscellaneous Research Files** module now contains 52 folders. There are over 350 files contained within those 52 folders. Please use them. All of that work is for your benefit and was done with you in mind. Take advantage of it! By the same token, let me know what you would like to see changed or added and I will do my best to accommodate.

Until next month, Blessings, Merry Christmas, and Happy Trails,

Glenn Hanger

President, Dutch Hollow Hanger Cemetery