

THE HEADSTONE

Vol. IV

January 2026

Issue I

Hello, Happy New Year, and greetings to all!

Well, I do hope the Christmas season was to your liking and that you found all of the holiday spirit as it was intended to be received. It is hard to believe that we are in a new year because if you are like me, you are wondering where the last one went. One thing is for sure, thinking of all of the things that in youth I was in no hurry to do, and all of the same things in mid-life that I figured I still had time to get to, well, I now accept that much of it will never get done! Oh well, such is life for many of us I suppose but I do hope your own bucket list is a little emptier than it once was.

Middlebrook Items

At least as early as 1880 the Staunton newspapers carried columns composed by various “embedded” writers from the various communities throughout Augusta County. There were columns for Mossy Creek, Walkers Creek, Midway, South River, and the list goes on and on. There was such a column for Middlebrook. The frequency of inclusion in the papers varied from month to month. Sometimes there were only eight or nine articles for the whole year and other years there might be three articles in one month. I guess it might have depended on just how much news there was to print. Each of these columns, having their own community writer depicting the life (and lifestyles) of each community gave the articles a character of its own. I would argue that as much or more can be gleaned from these articles as from any other source regarding the early Augusta County communities. And as for accuracy, these articles were “proofread” by every person who could read a newspaper and just as soon as the article came off the press, not months or years later. I would also argue that if the facts of these community writers ever got too misconstrued, we would read about that as well!

Anyway, doing research on the founding of the town of Middlebrook and the years of development that ensued, I had the opportunity to read just about every Middlebrook Items column that was ever written and rather than sentencing these articles to a life of confinement in my computer, I decided to add them to the website files. They are accessed by clicking the Miscellaneous Research Notes tab and then scrolling down to the Middlebrook Items tab and choosing which year you wish to access. All of the columns for the listed year are within a single file. I started (I’m just getting started!) in 1880 and while I have on file well over two decades of articles with more to be filed, it takes a while to get them formatted and uploaded to the website. My goal is to have all of them available for you to access by spring. But then again, keep in mind what I wrote at the beginning of this newsletter!

Middlebrook Union Church

In the year 1819 four men of the two-decade old town of Middlebrook chose to act as trustees and purchase Lot 59 from Nancy Scott, the wife of the town's founder William Scott for the purpose of erecting a house of worship which in the deed is referred to as "Union Meeting House in Middlebrook" for the price of \$50.00. The Trustees were Isaiah Shipman, John Sproul, William Nelson, and John Bumgardner.

I will not bore you with all of the details of the purchase, and I know little of the construction at this point other than it was brick as you will learn again later. I do have a pretty neat photo of the original key to the church. It was purchased on ebay ten or fifteen years ago by author and historian Nancy Sorrells, who was willing to take a photo of it so I could add it to the newsletter! And she even threw in some research on the fellow from whose collection it came.



Above is a photo of the key. The tag was attached when purchased. And this is the research that Nancy has shared. *There was a man in Covington named Warren Spitler who collected antiques and apparently had an antiques business. He died in 1978 with no children but he was apparently related the Spitlers in southern Augusta County. His "collection" came up in pieces on ebay and that's when I bought the key. I know some other items, including the Middlebrook Shanghai pic, that came out of that series of auctions. Spitler was from Middlebrook and is buried at Mt. Tabor.*

What wonderful history we so often stumble upon. Sharing it often makes it come alive. Not sharing it makes it a secret, which is the enemy of history.

WARREN SPITLER
COVINGTON — Warren Spitler, 93, of Covington died Thursday morning (May 4, 1978) in a Covington hospital.
He was born Sept. 18, 1884 in Middlebrook, son of M.E. and Mary (Smith) Spitler.
He was a retired salesman and a member of the Methodist Church.
Surviving are one niece and one nephew.
A service will be conducted 1 p.m. Saturday in the chapel of Loving Funeral Home with burial in Mt. Tabor Cemetery.

The following is a little of the general research that has been completed on the churches of Middlebrook. Most of the newspaper quotes were found in the Middlebrook Items column that I wrote about on page one. Again, just rough chronological notes with little or no continuity.

Middlebrook Union Meeting House (Church) & Notes on Grace German Reformed And Holy Trinity Lutheran Church January 25, 1819

January 25, 1819

Barnhard Lowman, acting as the attorney in Augusta County, Virginia for Nancy Scott and others who were by this time residing in Blount County Tennessee, sold to Trustees Isaiah Shipman, John Sproul, William Nelson, and John Bumgardner Lot 59 for \$50.00 for the purpose of erecting the Middlebrook Union Meeting House. This was intended to be a non-denominational / multi-denominational church for the people of Middlebrook and the surrounding area. Deed Book 43, Pages 178 & 179.

September 2, 1844

Earliest known documented burial at Middlebrook Union Church Cemetery. James William Warwick (1842-1844)

December 6, 1846 – March 28, 1914

27 known burials occurred during this sixty-eight-year period.

May 13, 1880

The Valley Virginian Newspaper writes in an article titled 'Middlebrook Items', the following: 'We have two churches, one a Union church for the accommodation of all denominations. The other, a protestant Methodist, not quite finished but already under the pastoral care of Rev. Mr. Stover from Baltimore, and the people seem to think he is the right man in the right place.'

[This was likely Oakland Chapel that was on Stover School Road about 1.5 miles east of Middlebrook.]

January 20, 1881

The Valley Virginian Newspaper writes the following: "We attended services at the Union Church on last Sunday at this place [Middlebrook] conducted by the Rev. Samuel Whitmore, and were afforded the great pleasure of hearing one of the best sermons that has been delivered for some time in this place. Mr. Whitmore is a Christian and a gentleman, surely he is an honor to his parents as well as relations, any community should be extremely proud to own him.'

September 25, 1881

Grace German Reformed Church was dedicated September 25, 1881.

See: Newspapers.com. *The Valley Virginian*, Staunton, Virginia. 6 October 1881. Page 1. (Middlebrook Items)

[Grace German Reformed Church was built where the Middlebrook Schoolhouses now stand.]

[By the late 1800s, Middlebrook boasted a population of 274 inhabitants, making it the largest village in Augusta County at that time. In 2020 the population was 184.]

December 11, 1884

The Valley Virginian recorded on page 3, "Rev. Mr. Stickney, the new Lutheran preacher of this place is carrying on a protracted meeting at the Old Brick Church.

May 28, 1885

The Valley Virginian recorded on page 3, "On Sunday, May 17, Mrs. Elizabeth Webb, wife of the late Wm. Webb, was buried at the Old Brick Church, Middlebrook. The funeral services were conducted by the Rev. Stickney. She was a pensioner of the war of 1812, and aged about 79 years. One by one the widows of those aged veterans pass out of sight until they are getting few and far between."

July 30, 1885

The Valley Virginian Newspaper writes the following: "The new Lutheran Church at this place [Middlebrook] being finished, we would call your attention to the tin roofing which was put on by our young mechanic Mr. A. R. L. Talley, who is ready to serve the public with guttering or roofing; headquarters in Greenville. The dedication of this church will take place on next Sunday next, August 2d. Rev. Dr. Fox, of Roanoke College, is expected to preach the dedicatory sermon, The new organ will be in position by that time. Let all who can attend."

[The cornerstone on the Holy Trinity Church (Lutheran church noted above) bears the Date June 14, 1884.]

October 8, 1885

The Valley Virginian recorded on page 3, "Since my last article death visited our village and removed Mr. George Fix from our town. Mr. Fix died on the 18th of September and was buried at the Old Brick Church on the 19th. The Funeral was conducted at Grace Reformed Church of which he was a member by the Rev. Stickney of the Lutheran Church. The large concourse of relatives and friends that came together showed the respect with which the deceased, though poor, was held. He was a blacksmith of the old, honest type, a



Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Middlebrook, Va. (2025)

good workman, honest and harmless, Mr. Fix was 66 years old, and died in the bright hope of a rich treasure in heaven."

January 28, 1886

The Valley Virginian recorded on page 3, "On the 15th, an oyster supper was given in the Old Brick Church, for the benefit of the Good Templars, which netted about \$20.00."

July 28, 1887

The Valley Virginian recorded on page 3, Died on the 12th, Miss Bertie Potter, daughter of Mr. George Potter, aged about 14 years. The deceased had been a sufferer for some time with Brights disease. Her remains were interred at the old brick church. Funeral services by the Rev. Gumbird.

January 29, 1890

The Staunton Spectator recorded on page 3 under the heading, Middlebrook Items, "We notice the cemetery here is being converted into a cow lot by somebody. Since the downfall of the old brick church, there seems to be little concern what becomes of the cemetery wherein sleep many people. There always has been an element here who have shown a disposition to desecrate the graveyard and lay unholy hands on the fencing thereof for fuel &c. This place needs a cemetery very badly, and if the Rev. Sam. C. (sic) Whitmore had remained here it would have had one, as he seemed to be the only one having energy enough in that direction to have secured one. We wonder if the people of those new towns springing up send any work they want done off somewhere else to have it done. We guess not; that is the way to build up a town. When you see all the work from a place going somewhere else to be done, you may know that place is never going to be anything. There is a great deal done nowadays to kill a place under the name of encouraging home industry, and is generally by those who boast loudest of the aid they give the laboring man."

March 19, 1890

The Middlebrook Union Meeting House was sold to be torn down. The March 19, 1890 issue of The Staunton Spectator records the following: "The old brick church was to be sold last Saturday and we guess it was. The school boys had about knocked it down any how, and it had become very dangerous. The cemetery here will be the next thing to go down, and it won't be long about it either."

November 20, 1947

Last known documented burial at Middlebrook Union Church Cemetery. Julia Poindexter Pryor (1865-1947), daughter of a freed slave, Abraham Poindexter (1846-1913), and his wife, Eveline Brown (1842-1914). They were married June 13, 1868. (Eveline's last name is also found as Goodloe on a number of records) Abraham was owned by William R. Dunlap who owned a farm just outside of Middlebrook. Dunlap was born about 1818 and died in May of 1862.

I have included, maybe at the expense of redundancy, the actual Middlebrook Items columns where some of the information about the Middlebrook Union Church was found. This will give you an idea of what these columns generally consist of so you can decide for yourself if you will want to access them on the website once I get them all uploaded. You may have to enlarge to

make it a little easier to read. The initials at the end of the articles are the initials of the "community" writer that submitted this information to both the Staunton Spectator, The Valley

Virginian, The Old Dominion Sun, and The Staunton Daily Leader over almost three decades. W.H.W. were the initials of William Henry Weaver (1839-1913), who was buried at Oakland Cemetery, located about two miles east of Middlebrook.

And while on the subject of newspapers: I of course use newspapers.com, and anyone else who uses it can attest that getting the right search word(s) makes or breaks your research. In the case of Middlebrook Union Church, not until I realized that it was consistently referred to in the Middlebrook Items column as the "old brick church" was I able to get successful search results.

Middlebrook Items.

[Reported for the VIRGINIAN.]

On Saturday last, we had a drenching rain, proving beneficial to the growing wheat, which looks backward yet, but has come up since the rains, notwithstanding the fears of the farmers that grain had rotted. Scarcely half the usual acreage is sown.

On last Thursday night, a horse belonging to Mr. Huffman, who is working at this place, was stolen from the stable of Mr. J. B. Fauber. No clue has yet been found to the thief. Mr. Huffman is doing the brick work of the new Lutheran church which is now nearly ready for roofing. [The thief has been captured.—Eds.]

The large concrete parsonage house, near Grace church, being erected by S. L. Whitmore, is nearly completed. The carpenter work is being done by our young mechanic, Mr. Harman Rosen. For design and neatness of finish it shows that Mr. Rosen is a thorough mechanic. If we had more young men like him there would be less of our money going North for what could be done here. He is not afraid of being disgraced by being called a mechanic.

I was shown a bureau at the shop of J. B. Fauber made of Virginia red cedar, which was certainly beautiful. Persons wishing good hand made furniture, fine enough for any, need not go farther than to our townsmen, J. B. Fauber and S. M. Helms.

Rev. Mr. Stickney, the new Lutheran preacher of this place, is carrying on a protracted meeting at the old brick church.

Some stir is being made about the post-office at this place, "asking is it I? Is it I?" I have never heard any complaint against the present incumbent, Mr. J. B. Fauber. On the contrary Democrats as well as Republicans have acknowledged him to be a good postmaster.

In conclusion let me say to our Republican friends stand firm; be of good cheer. Such means as was employed at this election will have a reactionary effect. We old-time Republicans stood firm to the flag of our country when even our lives were in peril, how much more firm stand we now.

W. H. W.

Middlebrook Items.

[Reported for the VIRGINIAN.]

The weather still continues wintry.

On the 15th, an oyster supper was given in the Old Brick Church, for the benefit of the Good Templars, which netted about \$20.

On Tuesday last Mr. Robert Swartz was married at the Reformed parsonage by the Rev. Mr. Gumburd, to Miss Lillie Lowman, daughter of Mr. Daniel Lowman.

Miss Lillie McChesney died at the residence of Mr. A. E. Armstrong, on Sunday evening last, aged about 77 years.

Died at his residence, near this place, on Friday last, Mr. Alex. F. Smiley, aged about 77 years. He died with the hope of entering the rest prepared for the weary, for if any man had a cause to need rest, it was certainly the deceased. He was a man of iron constitution and from his youth was a most steady worker at the hardest farm labor. His remains were interred at Old Providence Church, of which he was a member.

The Valley Virginian, Staunton, Virginia. 28 January 1886. Page 3.

Middlebrook Items.

[Reported for the VIRGINIAN.]

Since my last article death visited our village and removed Mr. George Fix from our town. Mr. Fix died on the 18th of September and was buried at the Old Brick Church on the 19th. The funeral was conducted at Grace Reformed Church of which he was a member, by the Rev. Stickney of the Lutheran church. The large concourse of relatives and friends that came together showed the respect with which the deceased, though poor, was held; he was a blacksmith of the old, honest type, a good workman, honest and harmless. Mr. F. was 66 years old, and died in the bright hope of a rich treasure in heaven.

Our aged citizens, Mr. and Mrs. Shelton, have recovered from their recent illness and are able to be around again.

Refreshing showers of rain have fallen which have given a fresh impetus to wheat sowing, but the crop will fall below the calculation, as large areas are not plowed owing to the drouth.

Large quantities of cider and apple butter are made, and also considerable apple brandy. Many winter apples will be gathered. The large apple crop should be utilized as far as possible to bring money into our county.

Accident.—One day last week as Mr. David B. Weaver was working at his trade, carpentering, on a building near Raphine, Valley R. R., the scaffolding gave way and precipitated four workmen to the ground, some fifteen feet, but luckily none were fatally injured but all badly bruised. Mr. Weaver is now able to be around on crutches. We Republicans are waiting anxiously to see what the Democrats will have on their circulars before the election. One year it was Danville, next Massie's Mill, may be this year bitter pill.

W. H. W.

Middlebrook Items.

[Reported for the VIRGINIAN.]

On Sunday, May 17, Mrs. Elizabeth Webb, wife of the late Wm. Webb, was buried at the old Brick church, Middlebrook. The funeral services were conducted by the Rev. Mr. Stickney. She was a pensioner of the war of 1812, and aged about 79 years. One by one the widows of those aged veterans pass out of sight until they are getting few and far between.

On the same day the funeral services of Miss Sallie Carter Jennings, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Jennings, was conducted at the house by the Rev. Mr. Shipman, pastor of the Baptist church of Greenville, of which the deceased was a member, assisted by Rev. Jas. Murray. The deceased was about 17 years old. She had been confined to her bed for probably over twelve months. She leaves her parents in their declining years lonely with no other child to cheer the household; but she leaves the comfort behind that she had not forgotten her Saviour in the days of her youth.

Mr. Jas. McCutchen is lying very low.

We hope that our western papers will make a note of the accidental death of our friend Jno. H. Plunkett. He was born and raised to early manhood in this town, and many of its once citizens have gone to the far West who would feel interested enough to mingle their sorrow with the people of Middlebrook and Staunton.

Mr. P. B. Hogshead, once a dry goods merchant at this place, but now insurance agent for several companies in Staunton, paid a visit to this place. He looks as if the people of Staunton had treated him kindly.

Rev. S. L. Whitmore also visited this place last week, and remained over Sunday and preached at Grace church Sunday morning, and at St. Paul's church in the evening. Mr. W. is well pleased with his new field of labor and reports his work in a prosperous condition.

The recent rains have refreshed vegetation and grass, oats, and corn are looking well. The farmers are inspired with new zeal and ground is being plowed for corn that was hitherto too hard for plowing.

W. H. W.

As noted earlier, the nuances of a community can be revealed in these community news columns. Likewise, I think you can see a marked difference in writing style between those earlier articles written by "W.H.W." and the writer of the article to the right, "Q," in 1890.

We notice the cemetery here is being converted into a cow lot by somebody. Since the downfall of the old brick church, there seems to be little concern what becomes of the cemetery wherein sleep many people. There always has been an element here who have shown a disposition to desecrate the grave yard and lay unholy hands on the fencing thereof for fuel &c. This place needs a cemetery very badly, and if the Rev. Sam. C. Whitmore had remained here it would have had one, as he seemed to be the only one having energy enough in that direction to have secured one. We wonder if the people of those new towns springing up send any work they want done off somewhere else to have it done. We guess not; that is the way to build up a town. When you see all the work from a place going somewhere else to be done, you may know that place is never going to be anything. There is a great deal done now a-days to kill a place under the name of encouraging home industry, and is generally by those who boast loudest of the aid they give the laboring man.

Q.

Staunton Spectator, Staunton, Virginia, 29 January 1890. Page 3.

Why We Do What We Do

Often I am asked, "What made you decide to clean up the cemetery?" or something to that effect. We have probably all been asked a similar question about our particular passions or vocations in life. Most recently I had asked Pauline McKee, Curator of Big Spring - McKee Cemetery in Rockbridge County, to consider writing an article for the Headstone. Pauline has worked tirelessly to bring that cemetery "back to life," a process that I and many other readers of this newsletter can relate to. She agreed to write something and the article below is what Pauline has prepared for this month's edition, and I think it is quite fitting. I think it also answers the question that others ask us, and yes, the one that we often ask ourselves ... "Why DO we do what we do?" I hope you enjoy the article. Thank you Pauline, your passion for cemetery preservation is palpable.

Connecting descendants with their Ancestors

Jacob "Jake" McCown and his father, James "Jim" William McCown Jr., recently visited the McKee/Big Spring Cemetery in Kerrs Creek to see the recently unearthed tombstones of two of their ancestors.

Civil War Capt. John Alexander McCown (1840-1918) and his wife Catherine Selena Dixon McCown (1856-1899) were Jim's great-grandparents, and Jake's great-great-grandparents.

Jim and Jake McCown had no idea where they were buried, until members of the McKee/Big Spring Cemetery Association uncovered them beneath the turf after they were located with ground penetrating radar. Research on find a Grave by Pauline McKee discovered the graves were connected to the wrong McCown family and his civil war service was missing. Cemetery volunteer Sarah Clayton remembered that she went to high school with Jimmy and made a call. The McCown family lives fifteen minutes from the cemetery.

"I've been by this place a thousand times," says 31-year-old Jake, "and never imagined I had family buried here."

The tombstones are elegantly wrought with beguiling epitaphs: Selena's reads: *"Mother, thou hast from us flown, To the regions far above, we to thee erect this stone, Consecrated by our love."*

John McCown never remarried after his wife's early death at 43 in 1899, when the last of their eight children was 13 years old. His stone reads: *"Thou who driest the mourner's tears, how dark this world would be, did we not know our father dear, was only called to thee."* John McCown was the last burial at this cemetery in 1918.

The modern-day McCown family still farms an original 220 acres in Rockbridge Baths that their ancestor bought from the Borden Grant in 1744.

"Working in the fields and woods rebuilding these old fence lines and walking the same steps as my ancestors, means a lot to me," said Jake McCown, who recently took his young children to visit their newly "discovered" great-great-great-grandparents in the graveyard.

The McKee/Big Spring Cemetery Association is hoping to collect stories from anyone who has family buried in this cemetery, eventually to complete, as far as possible, a record of who lies in the unmarked graves and, too, biographical information of anyone buried there.

As a result of this connection, Jake McCown had volunteered his construction company to tear down the old wire fence line and put in a new fence. Additionally, he has offered to assume responsibility for mowing the cemetery.

The McKee/Big Spring cemetery was founded in 1759 as the final resting place for many of the original Kerrs Creek pioneer families including the 22 who were killed in the Indian Raids of 1759 and 1763.

(Just as a sidenote, Rockbridge County was established in 1778 from neighboring Augusta & Botetourt Counties)

The McCown children stopped by after church to visit their third great grandfather Captain John Alexander McCown. Through this project we found the buried gravestones of their third great grandparents and connected them to their ancestors.



New Lifetime Member

News Flash! We now have a fourth member who has chosen to become a Lifetime member of the cemetery group. It is none other than Michael Clinebell, whose 3g grandparents, Henry and Leah Wherle Clinebell are buried in Dutch Hollow, as are several of their children. Sarah Leah Wherle Clinebell and my 3g grandmother, Catherine Wherle Hanger were sisters. That makes Mike and I 5th cousins. Thank you Mike.

ACGS Planned Programs

- **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

Michael Clinebell 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 - 204 Total

Obituaries & Death Notices - 1141 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 - 146

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, Happy New Year, and Happy Trails,

Glenn Hanger

President, Dutch Hollow Hanger Cemetery