



NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 59, NO. 4 December 2014

Dear AHS Members and Friends:

This issue of the AHS Newsletter brings the calendar year to a close and with it, reflections on good news and sad news. The sad news was the death December 2 of Sara Collins, one of the most outstanding personalities in Arlington history in our time. Sara's crowning achievement was to create and nurture the Central Library Virginia Room (now the Center for Local History) and to establish many of its permanent features, including an impressive oral history archive of Arlingtonians. Speaking personally, I reached out to Sara upon becoming AHS president and found her invariably available, interested, and helpful in steering me in productive directions. Having been a president of AHS in the 1980's, Sara knew what would work well and not so well, and she dispensed wisdom in gentle paragraphs. AHS intends to establish a living memorial to Sara Collins, the precise form to be determined.

Besides maintaining and strengthening our two bedrock institutions – the Hume School museum and the Ball-Sellers House – AHS has devoted much of its energy this year to creating new relationships and re-energizing old ones. It has been a pleasure to hear so many people say how happy they are to see AHS covering more ground and taking new initiatives, indeed working to instantiate our mantra: “to help Arlingtonians better understand our community through its history.” We are championing the establishment of the Arlington Heritage Center in the redesigned Courthouse Square project, which, if realized, will bring a living sense of Arlington history to what will surely become a vibrant “town center” of Arlington County. The Arlington Heritage Center had an early burst of activity under the leadership of Charlene Bickford more than a decade ago. We hope that its time is coming now.

A major goal of AHS is to involve the Arlington business community in engaging its own history through collaborative projects that strengthen a “sense of place” for bricks-and-mortar establishments and other institutions that have a strong connection to Arlington County. We hope that at the end of the day we will see our all-volunteer organization engage a small, professional staff that can tell our stories even more effectively. A motivated, volunteer society can do a great deal, but the limits and opportunities missed are all too apparent.

All in all, we look to 2015 as an opportunity to spread our wings more widely and to introduce many more Arlingtonians to our shared local history.

John P. Richardson
President

IN THIS ISSUE:

ACFD RINGS BELL	2
NEW XMAS EXHIBIT	2
MARYMOUNT EXHIBIT	3
WORTH A LOOK	3
BALL SELLERS HOUSE	4
AHS MOURNS	4
COLUMBIA PIKE PROJECT	5
AHS + SMITHSONIAN	5
ARLINGTON PERSPECTIVE	5
DC HISTORICAL STUDIES CONFERENCE	6
SEASON WRAP UP	7



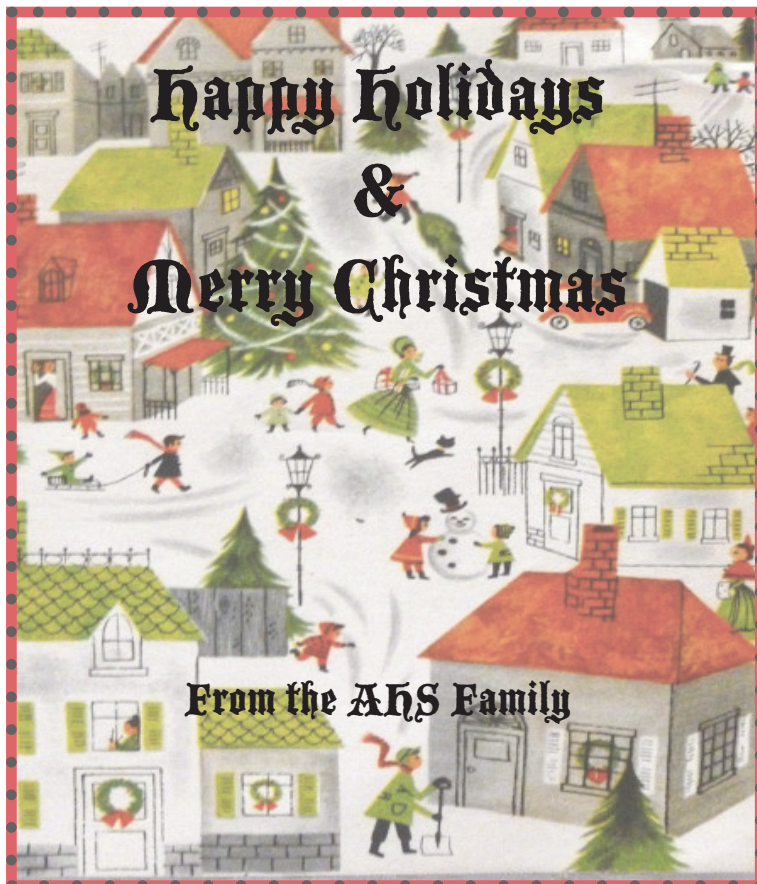
ACFD Rings AHS Bell

This past October, the Arlington County Fire Department repaired a broken bell rope in our beloved Hume School, home of the Arlington Historical museum. We called upon the help of the ACFD, who sent truck 105 from the Crystal City Station to employ its 100-foot aerial apparatus to reach the bell tower. The ACFD periodically provides non-emergency community services to groups such as the Arlington Historical Society.

Under the Christmas Tree: See What's New at the Arlington Historical Museum

by Dr. Mark Benbow, Museum Director, AHS

In the middle of the nineteenth century Christmas celebrations began to center more on families celebrating at home as opposed to consuming alcohol with friends outside the family circle. The Christmas tree, first popular in Germany and imported to the US, became an important center of family events. By the twentieth century the Christmas tree became the spot where gifts were displayed until they were opened on Christmas morning (or Christmas Eve depending on your family tradition), and because the holiday was increasingly focused on children, that meant TOYS.



The Arlington Historical Society celebrates the holidays with a new temporary exhibit every year. In 2012 it was antique tree ornaments. In 2013 it was Christmas cards of the 1920s and 1930s. For the 2014 holiday season we are featuring some of our collection of antique toys. “Floating, Flying and Racing: Toy Vehicles 1920-1970” focuses on toy cars, trucks, airplanes, and boats. The display showcases over two dozen toys and models from the very small to the very large in a display that many a child would have dreamed of seeing under their family tree one December morning.

“Floating, Flying and Racing” will be on display from December 7, 2014 through January 18, 2015. Visitors to the Arlington Historical Museum may also enjoy seeing two of our permanent exhibits; one of antique dollhouse furniture and our 1930s model train set. There are also new permanent exhibits on the Cherry Smash Company, the different ships that shared the name USS Arlington, and on the county’s African-American history.

Marymount Students to Display Exhibits at Arlington Historical Museum

by Dr. Mark Benbow

In January 2015 a series of mini-exhibits about the history of Marymount University, put together by Marymount students, will be displayed at the Arlington Historical Museum (The Hume School). The students are all taking Introduction to Public History, taught by Marymount Assistant Professor of History, Dr. Mark Benbow, who is also the Museum Director for the Historical Society. The class is part of Marymount's Public History minor. The students spent the semester learning about the different forms of public history by taking field trips to local museums and historic sites. A previous running of the class, in 2012, had the students suggest ways in which to improve the Ball-Sellers House and many of their suggestions have since been incorporated by the AHS at that historic home.

Dr. Benbow divided his students into three groups. Each group was allowed to pick their own topic, the only condition being that it had to be on some aspect of the history of Marymount and that their exhibit had to fit into a specific display case. They then presented their proposed exhibits to a panel of judges from the Society including AHS President John Richardson and Ball-Sellers House Director Annette Benbow.

The winning exhibit is on the Catholic Order that founded Marymount in 1950, the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM). Designed by Emma Enkhsaikhan, Dalia Faris, Amy Lawton and Apasrin Suvanasai, the exhibit features information about the founders as well as photos and artifacts from Marymount's early years. The new year will mark Marymount's 65th Anniversary in Arlington, as the exhibit opens to honor their efforts in creating Arlington's home university. The exhibit will open in late January, 2015.



Sacred Heart of Mary Chapel

The other two exhibits will also appear in 2015. The first will feature Dr. Rear Admiral Presley Marion Rixey, Surgeon General to the United States Navy and personal physician to Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. Rixey's property became what is now Marymount University and his home is now "The Main House" on the university campus. The second will show the history of the Ballston Building, AKA, Big Blue U or The Blue Goose, which is being torn down in early 2015 to allow for new Marymount Ballston Campus buildings to be built. The exhibit will show the history of the landmark building and the plans to incorporate some of its unique features in the new design.

The Admiral Rixey exhibit was put together by Sarah Campbell, Kelsey Christian, Colleen Haggerty and Tyler Roth. The Ballston exhibit is the work of Basil Al-Qaneh, Vernell Tanner, Derek Anzalone, William Baroz and Jason Moskel.

WORTH A LOOK!

by John Richardson



The remains of Abingdon Plantation at Reagan National Airport are worth a look. The plantation house, built by John Parke Custis, adopted son of George Washington, burned to the ground in 1930, but the foundation is well preserved, and the signage is excellent.

Nelly Park Custis, later wife of Robert E. Lee, was born at Abingdon. Reaching the site is a little tricky. The best solution is either to take Metro to National Airport or park in either Terminal A or Terminal B/C garage, since the ruins lie between the two garages. The airport has created a small but attractive Exhibit Hall in the original airport concourse (Terminal A), plus a series of sequential photos on the opposite side of the interior wall. Traces of Abingdon consist mainly of pottery shards, but they are put in context with supporting photos. Aside from aircraft noise, the Abingdon site is a pleasant and peaceful place.

Ball-Sellers House Gets Warmer

by Annett Benbow

This winter, the Ball-Sellers House is getting some internal protection from the cold. The Ball-Sellers House is two sections. The older section, which is open to the public, is the 1750s house preserved to its 18th Century beginnings. The other, newer section--built in the 1880s--is where our caretaker/tenant, Margaret Wagner, lives and keeps an eye on the house and property. Prompted by high heating bills last winter, we got an energy efficiency check-up for the 1880s section by the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP). They found that the 1880s section was sorely lacking insulation in the attic and under the house in the crawlspace. The windows of the 1880s house also did little to prevent cold air from getting in or warm air from leaking out. Finally the LEAP evaluators recommended that we replace the electricity powered heat with a more modern and much more efficient HVAC system. We are thankful for the efforts of several Ball-Sellers House Committee members: Tracy Hopkins, Margaret Wagner, and Gerry Laporte, for leading the effort to address these issues.

This is the less elegant side or the nuts, bolts, and inner workings of preserving a home for future generations. As this newsletter goes to press, Fifth Fuel, a Northern Virginia company, will add a new warm layer of insulation to the attic in the 1880s section to prevent heat loss through the roof. We've also had a structural engineer from the Arlington County Historic Preservation Program inspect the crawlspace to ensure that no structural reinforcement needs to be completed before we insulate under the house. Finally, we plan to dip into our rainy day funds to buy and install specially made internal storm windows for the 1880s section to prevent cold air from coming in while preserving the historic nature of the house.

But with all these improvements, an HVAC system is not in the cards this winter as we wait to see how much of an impact new insulation and storm windows have on the heating bill. They should, hopefully, save energy and lower the heating bills, but we will still need to replace the electricity-powered system to permanently fix the problem. This means we will have to raise \$20,000 for the new HVAC system. We simply do not have the "rainy day funds" for that type of expense. (Remember, the Arlington Historical Society is a non-profit organization that is entirely self-financing).

We will keep the Society's members up-to-date as we begin planning on how we can raise these funds. The entire structure, both the 1750s section and the 1880s sections, is on both the state and National Registers of Historic Sites and we will do everything we can to preserve this important historic structure in good repair for future Arlingtonians to enjoy.



The 1880s section of the Ball-Sellers House in last winter's cold weather --Photo by Margaret Wagner.

AHS Mourns Death of Dr. Talmadge Williams

By John P. Richardson

The death of Dr. Talmadge Williams September 27, 2014 took a longtime champion of African American history in Arlington County who served as chairman of the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington (BHMA) and of the local NAACP. Talmadge Williams was a close and respected friend of AHS who once served on the AHS board of directors. At the time of his death he was a key player in the creation of the first permanent exhibit at the Arlington Historical Museum on the black experience in Arlington, which is co-sponsored by AHS and BHMA. Dr. Williams was a focused and determined individual whose example serves as a model for the rest of us.



The Columbia Pike Documentary Project

by Max L. Gross

Culled from seven years of taking photography of people and sights along Columbia Pike, Arlington resident and photo artist Lloyd Wolf gave an audience of about sixty an enthralling and beautiful presentation at the Arlington County Public Library on November 13. The program, sponsored by the Arlington Historical Society, was drawn from Mr. Wolf's forthcoming pictorial book (accepted for publication by the University of Virginia Press) that he calls "Living Diversity: The Columbia Pike Documentary Project."

The diversity of cultures and ethnicities that live along the Columbia Pike corridor was the chief theme that dominated Mr. Wolf's presentation. Is there a country of the world that is not represented in the community of inhabitants that live on and near the Pike? The presenter's reference to the Bangladesh (Prio Bangla) festival recently held on S. 9th Street, near the Arlington Career Center, and drew nearly 3,000 people made this point as strongly as any. Would a Cambodian festival have drawn a similarly sized crowd? Probably.



Lloyd Wolf at Arlington
County Public Library

Mr. Wolf directs the program in partnership with several other photographers, two of whom he called forward to add their comments about the project. These include: Duy Tran and Aleksandra Lankueva, who also spoke, Xang Mimi Ho and Paula (co-founder of the project), and Todd Endo.

The program was most warmly received, on a rather chilly autumn evening, by an audience that included many Columbia Pike residents, as well as fans of the fine photography of Lloyd Wolf and his talented collaborators. Those who were unable to attend this event can view some of these photos on the project's blog at www.pikedoc.org.

AHS Information Table at Smithsonian Museum Program

By
John P. Richardson

AHS was selected as a "community partner" to participate in an excellent program, the weekend of November 8-9, run by the Smithsonian's National Museum of African-American History and Culture (NMAAHC) and conducted at the Historical Society of Washington in the Carnegie Library in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the program, which has been offered in eight other cities, was to encourage African-Americans to bring family treasures to the program, where museum conservation specialists were on hand to provide guidance in how to protect and preserve them. AHS program coordinator Jen Jablonsky, a staff program specialist at the museum, helped coordinate the AHS role. We had a steady flow of walk-on visitors to the AHS table, among the estimated 750 registrants for the overall program.

An Arlington Perspective on the Civil Rights Movement

By Max L. Gross

On October 9, 2014, an audience of 40-50 heard local Arlington resident Joan Mulholland tell her story of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, in which she was an active participant. The talk, sponsored by the Arlington Historical Society, was a fascinating first-hand perspective on personalities and events of the time. Joan was not only active in Arlington, but spent much time in the southern states participating in sit-ins and freedom-rides. She had acquaintance with many of the prominent personalities of the time, including Medgar Evers, whose grave she said she visits each year. He was a personal friend.

Growing up in Arlington, in the Buckingham apartments, Joan noted that the community in which she lived was characterized by great cultural diversity, and she grew up failing to understand the exclusivist attitudes of anyone. Participation in the civil rights movement when it got underway seemed only natural and indeed imperative.

She highlighted her presentation with clips from a film about the movement, made by her son, now a local film-maker. She entertained the audience by noting how he had "tricked" her. He wanted to make a film about the civil rights movement and made use of her to establish contacts with people to interview—only to learn when it was finished that it was a documentary about her. The DVD entitled Joan Mulholland: An Ordinary Hero, the True Story, is available from her and through the Arlington Historical Society at a cost of \$10.00.

AHS a Player in D.C. Historical Studies Conference & Bus Tour

by John P. Richardson

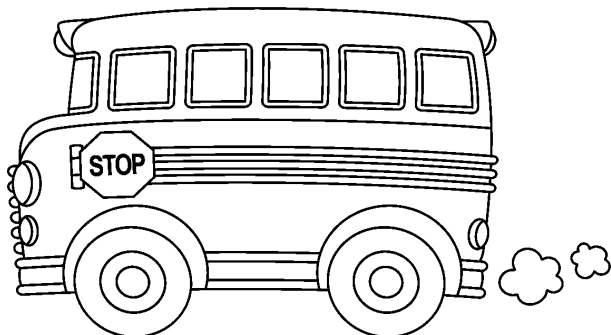
AHS played a prominent role in the 41st D.C. Historical Studies Conference from Nov. 21-23, both contributing to and benefiting from it. For the first time, Arlington County was the topic of a panel discussion that included AHS President John Richardson as moderator, Vice-President Karl Van Newkirk and previous program speaker Dr. Nancy Perry as a panelist, along with Nauck Community leader Dr. Alfred Taylor and Michael Chornesky.

The panel provided a natural segue to the Sunday afternoon bus tour of Arlington County, organized by



GMU Professor Dr. Laura Moore. Both the Hume School and the Ball-Sellers House were stops on the tour; the AHS board room on the second floor of the school received the 37 riders for a sandwich lunch. Dr. Mark Benbow, Museum Director, and John Richardson made comments to the group before their tour of the Arlington Historical Museum. Ball-Sellers House Director Annette Benbow organized a special contingent of docents to accommodate the several groups of riders necessitated by the small size of the house. The tour enlisted the support of several experts, including Drs. Perry and Taylor; Matt Penrod, the Park Ranger, for the Arlington House visit; local journalist Charlie Clark, who provided historical anecdotes for the afternoon portion of the trip; and

attorney Rich Samp, Old Glebe Civic Association historian, who gave a guided tour of the new signage at Ft. Ethan Allen. AHS also manned an information table at the Friday lunchtime History Network at the Carnegie Library, site of the conference. Participant comments about both the panel and the tour were enthusiastic. It will be interesting to learn how many new members we gained, but it is a certainty that both Arlington County and AHS are much better known to local history buffs as a result of the conference and tour.



Ball Sellers House Wraps Up a Successful 2014 Season

The Ball-Sellers House 2014 season has come to a close. November brings colder weather, and with no heat or electricity in the oldest house in Arlington--built in the 1750s--we close up the house until warmer April weather. The Ball-Sellers House relies on a baker's dozen of docents who provide visitors with a fact-based tour of the house, and show them how real colonial Virginians lived when Arlington was the frontier. They trace the ownership of the house from a farmer, a tailor, a family of entrepreneurs, a teacher, World War I vets who became federal employees, and finally a local government employee, Marion Sellers, who gave us the house in 1975. These wonderful, knowledgeable docents gave tours to 429 people this year. (In 2013 we had 341 and in 2012 we had 228.) A sincere and grateful thank you to all our docents:



Final tour of the season: On November 23 the DC Historical Conference bussed in a big tour group. A small team of docents shared why the house was historically important in the region, how it was built and who lived there to almost 40 people.

- | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Eric Casey | Ken Cohn | Karen Connair | Tracy Hopkins |
| Sasha Kramer | Gerry Laporte | Mary Niebuhr | Marlene Oronao |
| Martha Orth | Mary Vihstadt | Kevin Vincent | Margaret Wagner |
| Linda Warden | | | |

If you'd like to learn more about how to become a docent at the Ball-Sellers House, and share this unique piece of Arlington history with others, please contact Annette Benbow (annette.benbow@arlingtonhistorical-society.org)

2014 Ball-Sellers House Visitors By the Numbers:

- Total number of visitors in 2014: 429
- Average number of visitors for each day we were open: 8, not including special tours
- Number of special tour groups: 10, totaling 216
- Number of states that visitors were from other than Virginia: 9 (Illinois, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Texas, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, and Utah)



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Support the Arlington Historical Society: visit our book and gift shop at the Arlington Historical Museum open Saturdays and Sundays from 1-4 pm. We have many books on local history and note cards of our two museums. If you've visited either or both, note cards are a unique gift to give!



P.O. Box 100402
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The Arlington Historical Society (AHS) is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization founded in 1956 and incorporated under the laws of Virginia for literary and educational purposes that support research, collection, preservation, discovery, restoration and dissemination of the local history of Arlington County.

WWW.ARLINGTONHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

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1805 South Arlington Ridge Rd.
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BALL-SELLERS HOUSE
5620 South Third St.
Open Saturdays 1-4 p.m.
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Also arrange a visit by calling 703-379-2123
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