

Arlington Historical Society Newsletter

Fall-Winter 2016

Volume 61, Issue 4

President's Message

Karl Van Newkirk, President, Arlington Historical Society

Fellow members of the Arlington Historical Society:

Patrick O'Neill, the local archeologist who is supervising the exploration of the east yard at the Ball-Sellers House, has been hard at work since last July. Although the digging portion of the work has been completed, the analysis of what has been found will take a bit longer. We have known that there was at one time an extension of the house on the east side — photographs of it exist. What wasn't known were when it was built and by whom, when it was taken down, and what were its exact dimensions. Patrick's work has fairly definitively identified the base of the large chimney which is known to have been located in the east wall of the cabin extension. Of particular interest is the finding of not one but *two* drainage systems going through the footprint of the extension — one apparently built prior to, or perhaps simultaneously with, the cabin extension, and the other built after the above-ground structure was demolished. It seems that the house has had water problems for a long time! Stay tuned for more revelations!

You may be aware of the controversy surrounding the development of a parcel of land in Ballston. Central United Methodist Church, located at the corner of Stafford Street and Fairfax Drive, across from the Ballston Metro Station, submitted plans to redevelop their land into a multi-story, multi-use building that would include a new church sanctuary, space in which to provide church-related community services, and over 100 dwelling units, some of them designated affordable. It all sounded good, except that the plan also included the removal of the Robert Ball family burying ground. Robert Ball was the son of Ensign John Ball, the grandson of Moses Ball, and the grand-nephew of the John Ball who built what is now the Ball-Sellers House. Local historians, preservationists, and Ball family descendants were all concerned, and they raised a number of objections and counter-proposals. Your Society participated in these, and a modified development plan, accommodating the retention of the graves in their current locations, has been prepared.

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AHS NEEDS VOLUNTEERS!

Contact Volunteer Coordinator Robert White (robertwhite7@aol.com)

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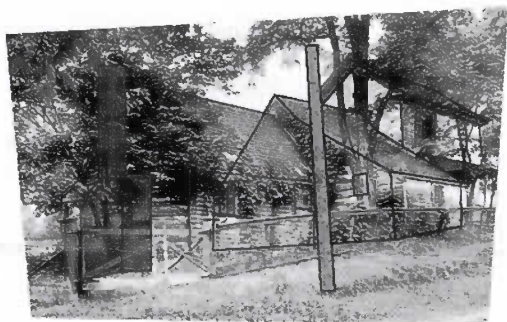
At the Arlington Historical Museum, a new special exhibit will be on display through the end of February: a commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Lomax AME Zion Church. This exhibit has been a joint effort between ourselves and the church, and we are happy to be able to provide them with space to show off the artifacts they have assembled. If you haven't seen it yet don't keep putting it off too long!

Karl

Archeological Field Work Completed at Ball-Sellers House

Annette Benbow, Director, Ball-Sellers House and AHS Board

The archeological field work at the Ball-Sellers House led by archeologist Patrick L. O'Neill was completed in early December. Patrick led more than 100 volunteers of all ages and experience levels who gave their time, energy, and enthusiasm and worked hundreds of hours from the heat of August into the cold of December.



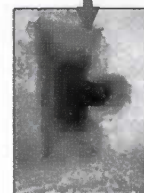
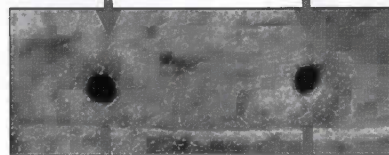
The goal for the excavation at the oldest building in Arlington County was to identify archeological information about the addition that was torn down in 1915 (left side of photo at left) and uncover anything that would give us some insight into how the residents lived there since 1742.

Although it was difficult to determine where the walls of the late eighteenth-century addition were located, three historic photographs survived to help tell the story. Two post molds were found in the area of

the southern porch (middle photo in group below). The post molds were located inside larger rectangular post holes which the team excavated (top photo in group at right). Remains of one of the cedar posts were still preserved at the bottom of the corner post of the porch (see photo at right; photos courtesy Patrick L. O'Neill). These two posts were clearly seen in one of the historic photographs of the Ball-Sellers House (top photo in group at right, AHS collection). Finding the post holes, combined with the photo, enabled Patrick to determine the dimensions of the addition.

A major reason for the archeological project was to improve water drainage from the original stone foundation and conduct an archeological dig to prepare for a pipe and native plant garden for drainage. Draining water away from the foundation has apparently been a problem since the house was built 274 years ago because, ironically, the team found not one, not two, but *three* historic drainage systems.

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("Archeological Field Work Completed at Ball-Sellers House," Continued from previous page)

- The first drainage system was a simple uncovered ditch in the gentle slope east of the log cabin. It was under the ceramic drain pipe labeled "B" in the photo below. This may have been dug during the time when the original builder, John Ball, lived here, or by the first generation of Carlin owners. (Photo courtesy Patrick O'Neill)
- When the addition was built, the gap remained intact between the foundation of the chimney to the left of the letter "C" in the photo to allow the water to continue to drain. Before the Civil War, the second generation of Carlins laid the ceramic "tile" drain "B" inside the open ditch, and the addition was built on top of it.
- The third drainage system was built using the materials of the addition and chimney when it was demolished in 1915 by owner Irene O. Young. This third system (labeled "D" in the photo) was a flat-bottomed channel dug to bypass the large (and hard to move) stones of the chimney foundation and was lined on the bottom and sides with handmade bricks with soot marks from the chimney top. Bricks and stones covered the brick drain.



Throughout the site, the team uncovered a treasure trove of artifacts representing all eras of Arlington history, including intact medicine bottles, pieces of ceramics, salt-glazed pottery, butchered bone, oyster shells, coal, glassware, and even evidence of Native American arrow and tool making.

Starting in January, the cleaning, research, and analysis will begin in the work room of the Arlington Historical Museum. Everyone is welcome to help clean, research, document, and reassemble the artifacts whenever possible.

In the future, look for Patrick to present his archeological findings at an AHS public program and for the artifacts to be on exhibit at the Ball-Sellers House and the Arlington Historical Museum.

If you would like to be a part of this amazing project, find out more about Arlington history (from the ground up!), and be the first person to identify these artifacts, please contact Annette Benbow at: BSH@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org.



At the dig site, left to right: Karl Van Newkirk (AHS President), Diane Schug-O'Neill (President, Northern Virginia Chapter, Archeological Society of Virginia), Annette Benbow (Chair, Ball-Sellers House Committee), and Patrick L. O'Neill (Lead Archeologist) (Photo by Elise Milstein; courtesy Patrick O'Neill)

Birthday Bash at "Reevesland"

Johnathan Thomas, Vice President, Arlington Historical Society

On the blistering hot afternoon of August 28th, 2016, neighbors in Arlington's Boulevard Manor community assembled an old-fashioned gathering at Reevesland for the dual purpose of celebrating former farmhouse owner Nelson Reeves's posthumous 116th birthday and rallying Arlington County to do something meaningful with the storied property. Neighbors Sandy and Joan Horwitt trumpeted the day, which included a folk band, homemade goodies, and two songs sung by the crowd, "The Ballad of Nelson Reeves" and "This Land is Reevesland, This Land is Your Land." Spotted among the 100 or so casual attendees was Arlington County Board Chair Jay Fisetto. It was a personal pleasure to attend, since, as a child, I used to deliver the *Northern Virginia Sun* newspaper to the Reeves home in the afternoon and would sit on the front porch bench swing with Mr. Reeves on rainy days. Though the large vegetable garden and old walnut tree are long gone, the beautiful view of Bluemont Park from the front porch remains a county treasure.



Nelson Reeves's Posthumous 116th Birthday Bash, Reeves Farmhouse

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Lomax AME Zion Church 150th Exhibit and Reception

Mark Benbow, Director, Arlington Historical Museum



Left to right: Rev. Samuel L. Wittaker, Brenda Cox, Dr. Mark Benbow

Several of Arlington's African American churches were founded in Freedmans Village. Among them was Lomax AME Zion Church, which has been long established in the historic Nauck neighborhood. This October the Arlington Historical Society opened an exhibit on the church's 150th anniversary. The exhibit was the product of work by Lomax Church member Brenda Cox, who gathered artifacts and information for the exhibit. There was so much good material that the exhibit used three cases, rather than the solitary case normally used for temporary exhibits. The display, which will be up through February 2017, included a beautiful choir robe, the original pulpit Bible, a quilt showing the church's history, photos, and documents from the struggle to desegregate

Arlington Schools (in which Lomax Church played an important role). It also included original home movies from the early 1960s, including the March and Washington and Hoffman-Boston's last Homecoming before desegregation.

On October 8th, 2016, a reception to open the exhibit filled the parking lot at the Hume School, and was the largest gathering at the Museum for an exhibit in a long time. Thank you to Ms. Cox and Lomax AME Zion Church for their cooperation and support.

September Public Program: Arlington National Cemetery: Then and Now

With Dean DeRosa

Max L. Gross, Editor, Arlington Historical Magazine

On Thursday evening, September 8th, 2016, Arlington Historical Society members and others enjoyed a delightful presentation on Arlington National Cemetery: Then and Now, given by Dean DeRosa at Marymount University. Mr. DeRosa currently is employed as a history interpreter at Mount Vernon and is also a National Park Service volunteer at Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial. He is also interested in stereographic photography (3D photography), which made up a part of his presentation.

Mr. DeRosa's presentation focused on the early formation of the National Cemetery that took place in the immediate vicinity of Arlington House (also known as the Custis-Lee Mansion). Through a careful comparison of period (ca. 1870) and modern photographs, he teased out images of how the Cemetery looked at its beginning compared with how the same area looks today. Some of the earliest graves were laid out near the mansion, around Mrs. Lee's beloved rose garden (still there today), in a clear effort by Gen. Montgomery C. Meigs, Quartermaster of the Union Army, to ensure that the Lees would never return to



Dean DeRosa

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("Arlington National Cemetery: Then and Now," Continued from previous page)

their former estate. Then a second section was laid out (today Section 13) to the southwest of the mansion grounds where a great number of Union soldiers were buried. Much of Mr. DeRosa's presentation focused on demonstrating how this plot looked in 1869, when the first Memorial Day services were held, with President Grant attending, and how it looks today.

Who knew (I certainly didn't) that there is another Tomb of Unknown Soldiers on the grounds of Arlington National Cemetery than the one we typically visit today? But there is another one, just west of the rose garden and between Arlington House and Section 13. And there is also a small adjoining amphitheater where the earliest Memorial Day services were held after the Civil War and before the current Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the new and larger Memorial Amphitheater were built to honor all fallen and deceased U.S. soldiers.

In sum, Mr. DeRosa provided a fascinating presentation on how Arlington National Cemetery appeared in its first years, and he neatly demonstrated how that early portion gradually changed to what it is today.

October Public Program: **Spies Among Us in World War I**

With Dr. Mark Benbow

Max L. Gross, Editor, Arlington Historical Magazine

Yes, there were German spies and saboteurs in the United States, including the Washington, D.C., area, during World War I. Dr. Mark Benbow, professor of history at Marymount University, listed several acts of sabotage that took place in our area at that time in a lecture on the subject to members of the Arlington Historical Society on October 13th, 2016 at Marymount University. A problem was that no spies nor saboteurs were ever caught, despite vigilant and almost vaudevillian efforts of official and non-official personnel to do so.

Following the U.S. declaration of war against Germany in April 1917, life became difficult for residents of German descent, especially those who remained unnaturalized. Forbidden even to enter Washington, D.C., unless they carried proof of U.S. citizenship, persons bearing German names faced many other restrictions during the War, including being forbidden to possess or use a wireless radio, to fly in a hot air balloon or aircraft, to be within 100 yards of any installation possessing any military significance, or to travel without permission anywhere in the United States. Arlington, then still Alexandria County (until 1920), being near the nation's capital, proved to be a locus of great concern about potential German spy activities

Chiefly responsible for the hunt for German spies was the Bureau of Investigation (forerunner of the FBI), but the Bureau was ably assisted by scores of individuals and volunteer groups eager to do their patriotic duty of reporting suspicious activities of their neighbors bearing German-seeming names. Having reviewed thousands of pages of the files of the Bureau of Investigation now held by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Dr. Benbow deftly wove together the story of some of the investigations undertaken by the Bureau. As noted, there were spies, but none were ever detected. Illicit romantic relationships, having too strong a German accent, or being too interested in German cultural activities (which tended to disappear during the War in any case) were generally sufficient evidence to raise suspicions. Although Germans were never interred as were Japanese during World War II, anti-German propaganda and widespread distrust of residents with German backgrounds were very real.

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The forty or fifty attendees of Dr. Benbow's presentation received an amusing and informative introduction to the topic. All may read about it in greater detail in the 2016 edition of the Arlington Historical Magazine. Dr. Benbow's article, "Spies and Slackers: The Bureau of Investigation's Search for Enemy Aliens and Draft Dodgers in Alexandria County, 1917-1919," leads off this year's edition.

November Public Program:
Arlington's New Deal Murals
With Author Toby McIntosh

Max L. Gross, Editor, Arlington Historical Magazine

Attendees of the November 10th, 2016 AHS program at Marymount University were treated to a fascinating and learned presentation. How many who make use of the main Arlington Post Office in Clarendon have taken note of the seven murals on the interior walls of the building? And, if you have noticed them, how many have wondered about their story?

One who knows their story and shared it with us is Toby McIntosh, local Arlington journalist who has told the murals' story in his recent book *Apple Picking, Tobacco Harvesting and General Lee: Arlington's New Deal Murals and Muralist* (BookBaby, 2016). The artist who painted the murals was Auriel Bessemer (1909-1986), an interesting character who in the 1930s and 40s maintained a studio and gallery on Dupont Circle in the District of Columbia (current site of a Sun Trust Bank). He was not a particularly successful artist, but he did win the competition to paint

The U.S. Post Office murals were a small part of a larger project sponsored and funded by the New Deal Works Progress Administration (WPA), which commissioned similar murals for about 1,100 post offices around the United States (see <http://www.wpamurals.com/>). Bessemer also won commissions to do similar murals for the post offices of Winnsboro, South Carolina and Hazlehurst, Mississippi, but many other artists were encouraged by this WPA project. After drawing the larger picture, McIntosh focused on each of the seven murals, assessing their symbolism, authenticity, and quality. For myself, the program was an eye-opener, introducing me to a world I previously knew nothing about.

New AHS Life Members

Jane Patrick Casey
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History Awaits. Come Visit!

Arlington Historical Museum

1805 South Arlington Ridge Road
Arlington, VA 22202

Hours: Wednesdays, Saturdays, and
Sundays 1:00-4:00 P.M.

Ball-Sellers House Museum

5620 Third Street South
Arlington, VA 22204

Hours: Saturdays 1:00-4:00 P.M.
(April through October)

The Arlington Historical Society, founded in 1956, is a non-profit organization incorporated under Virginia laws. The Society supports research, collection, preservation, discovery, and dissemination of Arlington County's history. Board meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at 7:00 P.M. in the Arlington Historical Museum at the Historic Hume School. Board meetings are open to the public.



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