



November, 2015

Promoting an understanding and appreciation of the  
history and culture of Nelson County, Virginia

Issue 4

## NCHS— Events 2015

**December 5th, 2015**

**Saturday—7:00 PM**

**The Nelson Center-  
Lovingson, VA**

**“Out of the Fire” - Kevin  
Crowe Documentary**

**December 12th, 2015**

**Saturday—10 am– 4 pm**

**Holiday Open House at  
Oakland Museum**

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Becky Howard -  
Editor

## HISTORY OF WINTERGREEN VILLAGE and the Southern Rockfish Valley

By Elizabeth Cabell Guy Richardson

The village of Wintergreen has a long and varied history. It was for years the center commercially and socially for the surrounding farm community, a beehive of activity hard to imagine from the small quiet area today. Over the years, operations near the intersection of today’s Route 151 and Spruce Creek Lane included a number of general stores, several mills, a series of post offices and voting precincts, saloons, two public schools, three churches, a distillery, blacksmith shop and foundry, wheelwright shop, several large tobacco barns, vineyard, orchards, and of course farms. Today, only one general store (now a museum) and a church remain at the intersection.

The community was known by the name of Slaughter(s) from the early 1880s till around 1900, after Samuel Slaughter, who established the area’s first post office in his store in 1881. In 1902 the name of the post office was changed to Wintergreen, after the adjacent farm of which the village had once been a part, and the community came to be known by the same name.

In visualizing Wintergreen village as it appeared in the past, it is helpful to know that, from about 1879 until the latter 1930s, what is now Route 151 from Nellysford turned sharply at Wintergreen and followed what is now Glenthorne Loop around to Beech Grove Road. The section of Route 151 which today runs directly from Wintergreen village to Beech Grove Road at Ski Barn did not exist previously. (Before 1879, the public road bypassed the Wintergreen village completely, running entirely on the other side of the Rockfish River in this area.) When the highway was reconfigured through the area in the 1930s, it was paved for the first time. The first electric line in Nelson County was strung along this highway from Afton through Wintergreen village to Foster’s Store on Beech Grove Road in 1938.

Land ownership by Europeans in what was to become Nelson County began in the early 1730s. At the time, this was part of Goochland County, becoming Albemarle County in 1744, Amherst in 1761, and finally Nelson County in 1807. As would be expected, the first land grants or patents were on the James River, but interestingly, next leap-frogged up to the Rockfish Valley, starting in 1735. This development was probably due to a combination of the availability of fertile well-watered and relatively-level land in the area and from Scots-Irish settlers crossing the Blue Ridge Mountains from the Valley of Virginia. By 1740, almost all land had been claimed on both sides of the south fork of the Rockfish River.

Rockfish is said to be another name for the striped bass which reportedly once migrated up the river before dams were built on the James River. The south fork of the Rockfish rises on Devil’s Knob Mountain within Wintergreen Resort, flows down

beside Beech Grove Road (Route 664), before turning north through the pastoral southern Rockfish Valley, past Wintergreen village, to join the river's north fork near Route 6. The main stream of the river flows south-eastwards from there to Howardsville on the James River. It was known as the Rockfish River by at least 1730.

(It is interesting to note that patents and deeds of the 1700s show the main waterways in the area with names quite different from those of today. The beginning of the south fork of the Rockfish River as it came down the mountain and through the Beech Grove area was then known as Stony Creek or Run, Spruce Creek was referred to as either Shamokin or Shoemaking Creek, and the present Stoney Creek was for some unknown reason called Bermudian or Bermuding. But by 1800, those names familiar to us today had come into use.)

Roads or paths quickly developed along the Rockfish River in order to access the farms that early grew up in its valley. The earliest known mention of a public road in the area appears in a 1740 Goochland road order stating the intention to build a road from a gap "above Morrison's" (probably Cub Creek or Brent's Gap) through the southern Rockfish valley to join the present Route 250 probably a little west of Charlottesville.

The largest patent in the Southern Rockfish Valley was 2460 acres, stretching from Stoney Creek on the outskirts of Nellysford, south to the foot of Horseshoe Mountain near Beech Grove. This vast tract was first patented in 1739 by a wealthy eastern land speculator, John Chiswell, who sold the whole patent to a Thomas Morrison a year later. However, problems with the patent resulted in it being reissued to William Morrison in 1748.

The Morrisons had been living in the future Wintergreen area since at least 1740. William Morrison quickly sold most of his patent to Morrison relatives and members of the Reid family, retaining 420 acres for himself. These two families were representative of the many Scots-Irish who migrated south from Pennsylvania to settle the Valley of Virginia. Less well-known is that a number of them almost immediately crossed over gaps in the Blue Ridge Mountains to settle in what became Albemarle and Nelson Counties.

In contrast to absentee land speculators from eastern Virginia, the families mentioned above made their homes on their property. In the late 1700s, many of the descendants of these original settlers moved west and south, selling their land to families seeking new land for tobacco to replace their worn out fields in eastern Virginia. The Morrisons and Reids, who had owned the area's land through much of the 1700s, gave way to newcomers such as the Colemans and Goodwins, as well as the Montgomerys, who accumulated large amounts of land and built or expanded large plantation homes in the valley. Five of the six old homes near Wintergreen village were owned by the Coleman family for much of the 1800s, with descendants or relatives continuing to own three of them through much of the 1900s. The Phillips family owned the other three during most of the 1900s and their descendants still own these properties today.

Wintergreen Resort, developed in the 1970s, took its name from the village and farm of Wintergreen, supposedly because the name was already shown on Virginia road maps.

Readers are encouraged to contact the Nelson County Historical Society with any additional information and pictures they may have.

**About the author:** **Elizabeth Cabell Guy Richardson** has always had a strong interest in Nelson County because of her ancestry. Both of her parents were descended from William Cabell, who was one of the earliest settlers in what became Nelson County, first patenting land on the James River in the 1730s. She is also descended from his first cousin, William Mayo, who took out patents on land in the Nellysford and Beech Grove areas around the same time.

**The previous article** is the introduction to her research on the area and Mrs. Richardson has graciously allowed other research articles to be published in the Nelson County Historical Society Newsletter. In the next few issues various aspects of southern Rockfish Valley history including stores, homes, churches, mills, farms, etc. will be included in these articles.

## Nelson County Native Kept Senate in Order

**Col. Edwin Alexander Halsey, born at "Fern Moss", Tye River in 1881 completed 40 years of service on Capital Hill**

### Edwin A. Halsey, Secretary of the Senate, 1933-1945

Behind the fanfare, oratory, and glamour of senatorial prestige, a clock works to keep the Senators running. The man who winds the clock is Colonel Halsey.

**Edwin A. Halsey** was born on September 4, 1881, in Nelson County, Virginia, Tye River community, the son of Don Peter and Sarah Daniel Halsey. His father was a lawyer who had served as a captain in the Confederate army. He attended local public schools, a private academy, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute. The sixteen-year-old Halsey's political education began in earnest on December 6, 1897, when, thanks to his uncle, Senator John W. Daniel (D-VA), he signed on for service as a page in the press gallery of the United States Senate. He worked in the press gallery for the next sixteen years, moving from page to assistant superintendent. Throughout this period, Halsey maintained his home-state political connections and won honorary appointments as "colonel" on the staffs of two Virginia governors. For the rest of his life, his friends knew him as "Colonel Halsey."



In 1913, when the Democrats took control of the Senate, Halsey moved from the gallery to the floor, under the jurisdiction of the sergeant at arms, to supervise the Democratic pages and assist Democratic members. Halsey's fitness for higher office within the Senate soon became apparent. Beginning in 1923, and again in 1927 and 1931, the Democratic Caucus expressed its confidence by nominating him as its candidate for secretary of the Senate. In each of these years, however this proved a purely symbolic gesture, as the Republicans, in the majority, had sufficient votes to elect their own candidates.

Halsey attended the ten Democratic national conventions from 1904 to 1940, serving initially as a press aide and, from 1928, convention sergeant at arms. In 1931, he entered a contest along with 100,000 others to create a slogan for the coming presidential election. He won a twenty-five dollar second prize for "Vote Democrat and eat regularly." For the 1936 presidential campaign, he designed a "lucky campaign coin" for sale by the Young Democrats Clubs. On one side the coin bore the likenesses of President Franklin Roosevelt and Vice President John Nance Garner, that year's party nominees, with the notation "Heads I Win." The reverse depicted the tail of a departing elephant and the inscription "Tails You Lose."

Halsey's election as secretary on March 9, 1933, coincided with the start of the New Deal's so-called Hundred Days, a frantic burst of legislative activity that lasted until mid-June. On his first day in office, the House of Representatives passed the Emergency Banking Act after only thirty-eight minutes of debate and without having seen the text of the bill. The Senate approved the act hours later and President Roosevelt signed it that evening. Other legislation designed to combat the Great Depression followed quickly and placed unprecedented demands on members and Senate floor staff. With more than a third of a century of Senate floor experience, Halsey helped absorb the shock of these demands.

Responsibilities for planning presidential inaugurations particularly engaged this secretary, who published a historical account of these ceremonies in the 1941 American Bar Association Journal. Early in 1945, Edwin Halsey actively resumed these familiar tasks in preparation for President Roosevelt's fourth inaugural, despite warnings from his doctors about a serious heart disorder. His previous experience with inaugurations held at the Capitol proved of little value, however, as this event was to be conducted, for the first time in history, at the White House. At the

January 20, 1945, ceremony, senators observed Halsey in his usual cheerful and accommodating demeanor. Nine days later, at the age of sixty-three, he was dead. A shocked Senate convened within hours of his death to express its sorrow at the loss of one who seemed so vitally engaged just days earlier. All sensed the ending of a major Senate career. No secretary, to that time, had come close to Halsey's longevity. Among secretaries, his total Senate service record is exceeded only by Carl Loeffler's fifty-nine years (1889-1949) and Mark Trice's fifty-seven years (1916-1973).

Senate leaders of both parties eulogized Halsey, Senator Harry Byrd (D-VA) declared Halsey enjoyed "the affection and complete confidence of every member". He was survived by his wife, the former Mary Younger of Lynchburg and a son, Lieut. Edwin A. Halsey.

"**Fern Moss**", once the Halsey home, is no long standing in the Tye River community. If you have a photograph of the home, please share it with the historical society.

**Source:** United States Senate Office archives

### **"Rock Cliff" in Wingina—added to the Virginia Historic Landmarks Register**

**Rock Cliff** was built circa 1840 and 1882, but today's 692-acre property dates back to a much larger 1738 land patent by Dr. William Cabell (b. 1699), the first Englishman to permanently settle the mountainous region along the James River west of the mouth of the Rockfish River, and who at his death in 1774 owned 60,000 acres.

One of Cabell's direct descendants, Dr. William Andrew Horsley, built Rock Cliff and today this is the only dwelling continuously owned and occupied by Cabell descendants on the historic patent. Additionally, Horsley's small office building where he examined patients still stands on the property.



Rock Cliff is also important for its association with Horsley's grandson, Dr. William Andrew Horsley Gantt, born there in 1892. Dr. Gantt worked with physiologist Dr. Ivan Pavlov from 1925 to 1929 in Leningrad, and later established a Pavlovian laboratory at Johns Hopkins University. In 1946 he received the prestigious science and medical field's international Lasker Award, and was nominated for, but did not receive, the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1970.

During the Civil War, Rock Cliff also witnessed, in March 1865, Gen. Philip Sheridan's Union forces entering the area and raiding the property, as described by Dr. Horsley's daughter in a diary.

The property is the home of Digna and Andrew Gantt. Rock Cliff was on the Nelson County Historical Society Home Tour in 2004.

Other Nelson County properties and historic districts that are on the historic register can be found at <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov>.

**Source:** Photograph and article from Virginia Department of Historic Resource website

## A Message From the President

In recent months, the Society has aided the efforts of Ms. Cabell Smith and other interested property owners to prepare and submit a preliminary application to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) for the proposed Warminster Rural Historic District. I am pleased to report that on September 17<sup>th</sup> the Virginia State Review Board concurred in the findings of DHR's staff that the Warminster Rural Historic District is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and that the district should proceed to listing. The district was evaluated at the local level of significance under National Register Criterion A (Exploration/Settlement, Ethnic Heritage: African American, Commerce, Community Planning & Development, and Transportation) and under Criterion C (Architecture) with a period of significance of ca. 1740-1930, beginning with the area's settlement by Dr. William Cabell and ending when new construction in the district, mostly domestic and agricultural in nature, generally came to an end. In addition to its known historic architectural and archaeological resources, the district holds great potential to contain a wide variety of Native American habitation sites dating to the Archaic and Woodland periods of Virginia's prehistory. The entire Preliminary Information form for the Warminster Rural Historic District can be found online at:

[http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/Counties/Nelson/062-5160\\_Warminster\\_RHD\\_2015\\_PIF.pdf](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/Counties/Nelson/062-5160_Warminster_RHD_2015_PIF.pdf)

Winning full recognition of the Warminster District on state and national registers will be a long and complicated project, but an exciting one. The Society's Board has agreed to solicit funding for the project and serve as fiscal agent, accepting and tracking donations and grants in a special fund that will be dedicated solely to this project. We are seeking to involve a local university "field school" of archaeology, as well as professional archaeologists and architectural historians, in the investigation.

The Society also teamed up recently with the Nelson County Office of Economic Development and Tourism, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) and the Lovingston Village Association to present a workshop on how owners of a wide range of historic buildings and structures can qualify for federal and state rehabilitation tax credits. Drawing over sixty people to the Nelson Center on November 20th, the workshop began with an overview by DHR staff members Elizabeth Tune and Jessica Ugarte of the federal and state rehabilitation tax credit programs and the process for qualifying for federal or state rehab tax credits. Following Q & A and lunch, presenters focused on local rehabilitation projects which have successfully qualified for the state and/or federal tax credits: George Krieger, on the rehabilitation and adaptive use of the 1931 Lovingston School as the Nelson Center; Bob Self, on the rehabilitation of the ca. 1790 Dairy and ca. 1860 Barn at Edgewood; and Bob Carter, on the rehabilitation of the ca. 1850 Gordon's Oak and Kitchen in the Lovingston Historic District. The workshop concluded with a tour of the Nelson Center led by George Krieger that highlighted historic features and treatment issues addressed in the rehabilitation and state and federal review process.

### Bob Carter



Bon Aire—overlooks the James River

### Nelson County Properties on the State and National Historic Registers

Bon Aire, Edgewood, Elk Hill, Hamner House, Lovingston High School, Lovingston Historic District, Major James Woods House, Montezuma, Nelson County Courthouse, Oak Ridge Railroad Overpass, Oakland, Pharsalia, River Bluff, Schuyler Historic District, Soldier's Joy, Swannanoa, Tyro Mill, Wintergreen Country Store, Woodson's Mill

## Recent Donations

### On Display at Oakland Museum

**Tyro Post Office Scales** -given by Barbara Massie Kusek—Stateline, NV

**1879 Singer Sewing Machine**—given by June N. Spitzer—Rustburg, VA

**Nelson County Times (1982-1990)** given by Aggie Burk Rives—Keswick, VA

### Placed in the Historical Society Files in the Nelson Memorial Library

Genealogy of the Dodd, Fortune, Higginbotham, and Wood families—given by Betty Elliott -Lynchburg, VA

Rockfish Church 1740-1986 by Esther M. Coleman, given by Phoebe Anne Tucker— Arrington, VA

“Rock Cliff” historical register documentation—given by Digna and Andrew Gantt—Norwood, VA

Virginia Climate Advisory Summer 1989 Vol. 13, No. 2 given by Elizabeth Richardson—Bon Aire, VA

Historical information about Pere Bruce Young , Shipman attorney—given by Bar Delk—Louisa, VA

Essay—“Susannah Ann Bolling (Arrington) and The Pocahontas Controversy”-written and given by John Arrington—Lynchburg, VA

## Programs and Events in December



### “Out of the Fire” Documentary

**December 5th, Saturday -7:00 pm—The Nelson Center, –Lovington, VA**—local premiere of “**Out of the Fire**,” an award winning documentary about Nelson County potter Kevin Crowe of Tye River

Pottery. The documentary follows Crowe and helpers as they complete a four-day, kiln firing. The film has been screened nationwide at several film festivals.

After the showing Crowe will be on hand to talk about the history of pottery and answer questions. Admission is free.



### Holiday Open House at Oakland Museum

**December 12th—Saturday 10:00 am—4:00 pm**

Oakland Museum will be decorated with traditional holiday greenery, music, booksigning, and refreshments.

**11:00 am -Tye River Elementary School students**, accompanied by Beverly White, will give a musical presentation.

**1:00 -4:00 pm -Cheryl Oliver Castor** will be at Oakland to do a book signing for her book on her great-great grandfather **John Edward Purvis** who fought with the Army of Northern Virginia throughout most of the Civil War.

**Oakland Gift Shop:** Items in the gift shop make unique Christmas gifts—historic maps, local history books, regional cookbooks and CDs.

**Enjoy holiday refreshments** all day and tour the Oakland Museum exhibits

**Christmas gift idea:** Give a Society membership to a friend or relative this year!!

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**Oakland Museum will be closed for the winter**, after the Holiday Open House on December 12th, and reopen again in March 2016.

## Dues, Dues, Dues

The annual membership dues run from January 1 to December 31. On your address label on this newsletter issue, your current membership year is indicated. Although the Society no longer has a "Life" membership option, there are some members who had obtained this designation in a previous year and it is still honored. A membership dues notice will be send out in January. You may remit your dues to the Society, address and membership information are on the front cover of the newsletter. Your donations are appreciated anytime during the year. Quarterly newsletters are sent to all members.

### Welcome New Members

Mike Sipple	Arrington, VA
James E. Falls, Sr.	Afton, VA
Carl Coffey	Roseland, VA
Robert Zurik	Houston, TX

### Recently Deceased Members

Ann Coleman Curry—	Lovingston, VA
Helen Oglesby—	Roseland, VA
Claudia Booker Slaughter—	Fredericksburg, VA

### Dedicated Society Member Remembered



**Claudia Slaughter** was an active member of the Nelson County Historical Society, serving as President (1998-1999) and a Society board member for many years. She was an enthusiastic propo-

nent of the Society's purchase of Oakland for the establishment of a county museum, serving on the Oakland Board from 2004-2010 until she moved from her home in the Lowesville area to Fredericksburg, VA. With her knowledge of Nelson County history she helped with the research for the Oakland property nomination to be placed on the state and national registers.

### Nelson County Historical Society

#### Officers and Board of Directors

Elected at the annual meeting on March 15th

President—Bob Carter

Vice President—Woody Greenberg

Treasurer—Beth Goodwin

Jean Brent

Robert Goad

Anke Goetz

Becky Howard

Brady Nicks

Leigh Thompson

Dick Whitehead

David Wooldridge

Andy Wright

Your involvement will help fulfill the mission of the Society :

To create and promote an interest in preserving, exhibiting and acquiring artifacts, documents, photographs, audio and video recordings and other sources and to interpret and exhibit Nelson County history.

Nelson County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 474  
Lovington, VA 22949

<http://www.nelsonhistorical.org>  
E-mail: [nchsva@gmail.com](mailto:nchsva@gmail.com)

Oakland Museum  
5365 Thomas Nelson Highway  
Arrington, VA 22922  
Phone: 434-263-8400

Oakland Museum Open  
April -December  
Saturday 10am - 4pm  
Sunday 1pm-4pm

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

### Annual Membership to the Nelson County Historical Society

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual @ \$15

\_\_\_\_\_ Family (spouses) @ \$20

\_\_\_\_\_ Supporting @ \$25

Checks made payable to:

Nelson County Historical Society

P.O. Box 474

Lovington, VA 22949

Donations to support our work and future  
development:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25

\_\_\_\_\_ \$250

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50

\_\_\_\_\_ \$500

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

Life Memberships will no longer be offered

Give a membership to a friend !!!