

Compass Project Helps ACHS 'Preserve the Past for the Future'

The year 2024 marked the 60th anniversary of the Augusta County Historical Society. Over those six decades, we have done much to celebrate, preserve, and learn about the incredible, diverse stories of Augusta County, Staunton, and Waynesboro. In fact, the ACHS mission is to preserve and share this rich history. The past has made us who we are now and can influence who we are in the future.

Much of last year was spent on our mission, while simultaneously making sure that in another six decades the mission will have continued unabated. "Preserving the Past for the Future," doesn't just happen, which is why the Society's Compass Project was unveiled at our Diamond Jubilee event in late August.

One of the most prized possessions in the Society's collections is an 18th century surveyor's compass crafted by Charles Hogshead of Augusta County. The Hogshead compass in many ways symbolizes the Society's desire to deliberately map out and plan for the future so that the good work of preserving and telling our communities' stories continues for generations to come. It therefore seemed very logical to call the financial master plan that undergirds the Society's Strategic Plan adopted in early 2022 **The Compass Project**.

The Compass Project brings together the long-term and short-term financial planning of the Society with an emphasis on both Annual Giving and Legacy Giving. An exciting component of the project is a partnership with the Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge. ACHS has established an endowed fund with the foundation, which will provide professional oversight and investment of our funds.

If you would like to know more about how you, a family member, or friend can help the Society "preserve the past for the future," please contact office manager Maitlyn Ritter at adminachs@augustacountyhs.org and ask for your own copy of the Compass Project folder.

—Nancy Sorrells, ACHS Past President



This Charles Hogshead surveyor's compass, the centerpiece of the Society's collections, symbolizes all the stories of Augusta County, Staunton, and Waynesboro. And now, The Compass Project will fund the telling of these stories, of the skilled crafts people, of exploration and settlement, of innovation, and of "Preserving Our Past for the Future."

The
**Compass
Project**

Augusta County Historical Society



PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

Dear History Lovers,

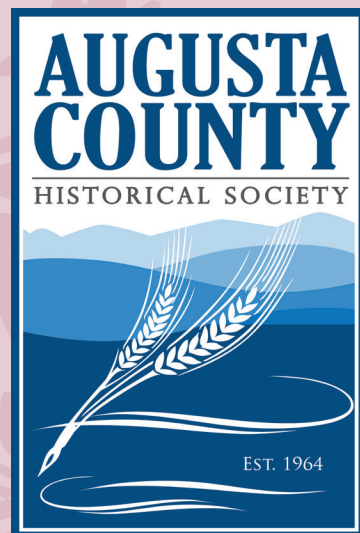
Welcome to 2025. The beginning of a new year gives us the opportunity to reflect on the past year and look toward the next. We accomplished a lot in 2024; two wonderful exhibits, excellent speakers and programs, the Compass Project, and the exceeded-our-expectations Diamond Jubilee Celebration. The accomplishments of one year's worth of hard work paves the way for the future of the Augusta County Historical Society as it heads into 2025.

We have a lot to accomplish this year, but let us lay aside for a moment the exhibits, programs, lectures, fundraising, research, scanning - all those things that we work so hard to bring to our community. Perhaps our most important goal for the new year is to afford you, our membership, increased opportunities to participate in all those things that the Augusta County Historical Society does so well.

The ACHS needs your voice, your input. We invite you to participate on our board committees, consider becoming a board member, man the ever-important front desk of the R.R. Smith Center, scan our wonderful archives, research new projects, and the list goes on and on. You can contact our office manager, Maitlyn Ritter, at adminachs@augustacountyhs.org, facebook.com/augustacountyhs, and (540)248-4151. We hope to hear from you!

Perhaps author, abolitionist, and historian Edward Everett Hale put it best: **"I am only one, but still I am one, I cannot do everything, but I can still do something; and because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I cannot do."**

*Yours in History,
Ray Wright, ACHS President*



ACHS UPCOMING CALENDAR

**On-going through
early November 2025**

"Voices from the Blue Ridge Tunnel: When Men were Machines," an exciting interactive exhibit, shines a light on the human story behind The Blue Ridge Tunnel construction that occurred 700 feet under Afton Mountain and opened to trains in 1858. The exhibition showcases the work of thousands of Irish workers and enslaved African Americans who turned French engineer Claudius Crozet's designs into one of the greatest engineering feats in the 19th century. Open and free to the public, Tues-Thurs 1-4, Fri-Sat 10-4, Sun 10-2. History Gallery, R.R. Smith Center for History and Art, 20 S. New Street, Staunton, Va.

**Sunday, May 18
3 p.m.**

Colonial patriot and hero George Moffett will be the topic of the Spring Meeting. Moffett was a pivotal figure during the French and Indian War and Revolutionary War. His leadership in the 1774 Dunmore's War drew attention to this Augusta County native. ACHS president Ray Wright will offer insight into Moffett's command at the Battle of Point Pleasant in Dunmore's War and the Battle of Guilford Courthouse during the Revolution. "George Moffett: Augusta Patriot" will be held at Tinkling Springs Presbyterian Church in Fishersville. Refreshments to follow. The program is free and open to the public.

**Saturday & Sunday
September 20-21, 2025**

"Conversations from the Grave: Meet the Residents of Thornrose Cemetery" returns. Guided tours take groups through this historic final resting place, stopping along the way to meet some of the cemetery's most fascinating spirits. Ticketed event. Tickets go on sale summer 2025. **SAVE THE DATES!**

For more information, e-mail the ACHS office adminachs@augustacountyhs.org or call 540-248-4151.

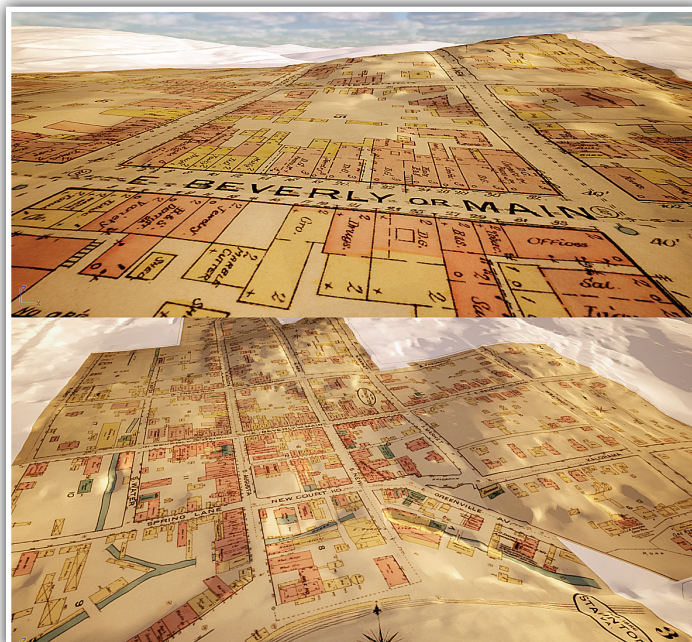
Board Launches Exciting Website Upgrade

One of the exciting decisions to emerge from the ACHS board's inaugural 2025 meeting was to partner with the husband-and-wife team of Bill Humm and Laurel Heydenberk of Light Heavy Industries to reimagine the Society's website. The end result will be an interactive website that better reflects our vision and mission of engaging ALL the community stories in the Staunton-Waynesboro-Augusta County area so that together we can "Preserve the Past for the Future."

Bill and Laurel, who are new Society volunteers, are the ones responsible for the stunning graphic design and the interactive computer program that is at the heart of our current "Voices from the Tunnel" exhibit. They will be working hand in hand with the board and other volunteers, but particularly ACHS Treasurer Grace Smith, volunteer Sam Biggers, and ACHS Office Manager Maitlyn Ritter, to provide a dynamic website and social media presence that showcases the story of our communities, provides digital access to collections, resources, and databases, streamlines our services such as sales and research requests, keeps members and the public up to date on important local history events, and provides easy access to important resources and partnership opportunities such as our Compass Project and our Strategic Plan.

Once complete, operation of the website and its various components will be maintained internally by Maitlyn, Grace, Sam and others within the organization who possess the advanced skill to ensure that we have an important presence in the virtual world.

The process as the board has outlined it will ensure that the website will be intertwined with the four pillars of the ACHS Strategic Plan: Strengthen Operational Capacity, Increase Accessibility and Visibility, Widen Engagement, and Advocate for Historic Sites. Over the coming weeks and months, the website team will enter into a discovery process to better understand where we are and where we want to go including a comprehensive technology audit that will result in a phased-in new look filled with exciting and innovative ideas. Stay tuned!



These 3-D maps of the Augusta County area show the type of digital imagery that will be available on the new website when it is complete.

Credit: Images supplied by Light Heavy Industries

—Nancy Sorrells, ACHS Past President

A New Record for "Gifts of History"!

The annual Gifts of History had a banner year in 2024. Thanks to the tireless work of Maitlyn Ritter, ACHS office manager, board members, and volunteers, the Society was able to raise over \$6,500 to assist with our mission. Opening in mid-November, and running until the end of December, happy shoppers visited both our gallery and the Staunton August Art Center's Art for Gifts. This year's proceeds almost doubled our best year since the beginning of this event several years ago.

What made the difference in our sales? First, the Society made certain our hours of operation were the same as the art center. No more guessing if and when we would be open. Secondly, we made sure there was a smiling face there to help with sales and questions. We also were able to restock and add new items daily so many shoppers returned more than once. ACHS has always relied on our members, volunteers and visitors to donate items for the sale. This year everyone went above and beyond. We cannot thank you enough for the generosity to help us with our mission.

As we begin 2025, leaving the holidays well behind, PLEASE think of ACHS. Our biggest sellers were books, Christmas ornaments, housewares, and any items people were happy to allow us to "re-treasure." We are thrilled to pick up and store until November 2025, so give us a call, 540-248-4151 or e-mail: adminachs@augustacountyhs.org. From all of us at the Augusta County Historical Society, our heartfelt thanks.

—Linda Petzke, Co-chair, Gifts of History

TOP: A wealth of holiday décor, books, and household treasures filled the History Gallery for the holidays. BOTTOM: ACHS President-elect Andrew Phillips works to transform the History Gallery into the Gifts of History for the holiday season. Gifts of History co-chair Linda Petzke (background on right) unwraps merchandise for display.



Bulletin Updates

One of the exciting benefits of being an ACHS member is receiving the annual journal, *Augusta Historical Bulletin*, which runs about 200 pages and is packed full of historical essays, information about our newest collections acquisitions, and informative book reviews.

Long-time members know that sometime in the opening months of the new year, they will receive the previous year's *Bulletin*. Putting together such an extensive book every year is a long process that culminates in a flurry of activity in the fall and results in printing and mailing sometime around the new year.

Last year, our flurry of *Bulletin* activity was sidelined because of all the other ACHS activity – the Yoder exhibit, the Diamond Jubilee, the unveiling of the Compass Project, and the grand opening of the “Voices from the Blue Ridge Tunnel” exhibit.

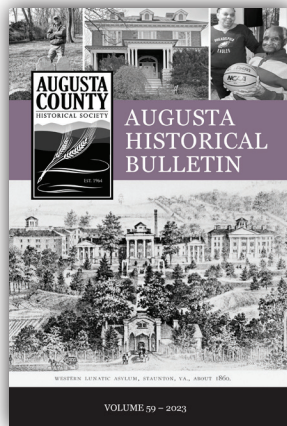
However, we have good news – the 2023 *Bulletin* should be arriving in your mailbox even as you are reading this newsletter. It is chock full of great articles about the restoration of the Dutch Hollow Hanger Cemetery, a Union raid on Western State during the waning months of the Civil War, Staunton's Soap Box Derby, and much more.

And the good news keeps coming – we have already started on the 2024 edition with the hopes of getting that to you by mid-summer. We have revamped the all-volunteer *Bulletin* staff slightly with the addition of new co-editor Tom Blair, a soon-to-be-retired lawyer and Augusta County native who brings excellent writing, editing, and research skills to the table. Tom's work has been showcased in previous *Bulletin* editions. He will be sharing the editing duties with Nancy Sorrells. Moving into more of an advisory status for the journal will be long-time editors Katharine Brown and Daniel Métraux. Both will continue to help with editing duties and Daniel will continue to write his much-anticipated book reviews.

Just a reminder that the 2024 *Bulletin* – the one that will hopefully be arriving by mid-summer – will be the unveiling of the digital version that will arrive in your inbox as a perk of your membership. We understand that many of you still want to turn paper pages, and you still can do that for an additional \$15. If you want to receive a hard copy of the 2024 *Bulletin* coming out this summer and are not sure if you have paid the additional \$15, please contact ACHS office manager Maitlyn Ritter at adminachs@augustacountyhs.org.

Finally, the *Bulletin* staff is always looking for interesting articles for the *Bulletin*. If you have something that you would like us to consider for an upcoming issue, please email Nancy Sorrells at lotswife@comcast.net.

Nancy Sorrells, ACHS Past President & Bulletin Editor



Welcome to Our Newest Board Member ...

Vera Hailey grew up on an Augusta County farm and is a lover of history and collector of stories as she “listened to the old people” including her paternal grandfather, who was born in 1891.

She retired as a magistrate from the Supreme Court of Virginia and established an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practice providing mediation, conflict coaching, group facilitation and training. She mentors law school students through judging ADR competitions.

Vera is particularly interested in Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) history as a foundation board member and owns properties in three Staunton historic districts. Renovation will begin on one of those properties, Staunton's first synagogue (1875-1925), in 2026. You might have crossed paths with her as a Smith Center for History and Art volunteer, or in supporting ACHS events. She enjoys traveling and was most recently in Cuba and Poland with her daughter, who attends Stuart Hall.

... And We Thank Our Outgoing Board Members

Oliver Dahl
Peyton Hamrick
Deona Houff

... for their years of dedicated service, time, and commitment to the mission and future of the Augusta County Historical Society.



Exhibit Tells Story of the Men Who Built the Tunnel

After a break during the holiday season, the Society's exciting educational interactive exhibit "Voices from the Blue Ridge Tunnel: When Men were Machines" is back in full force and will remain open until early November. The free exhibit is open Tues-Thurs 1-4, Fri-Sat 10-4, Sun 10-2.

Voices has been made possible through generous support from Altria Client Services LLC, Augusta County Economic Development & Tourism, Augusta County Railroad Museum, Blue Ridge Tunnel Foundation, C&O Historical Society, and Virginia Humanities.

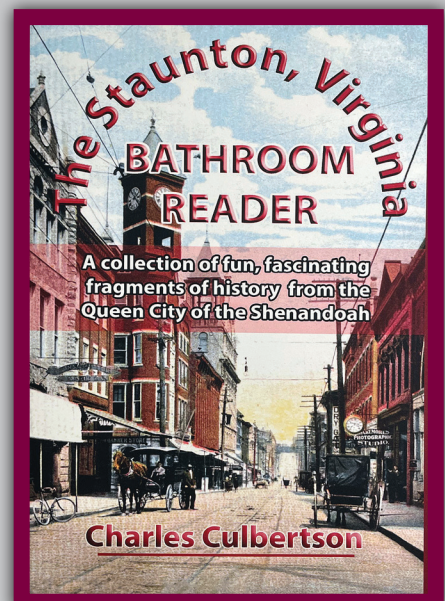
"Voices from the Tunnel" shines a light on the human story behind the Blue Ridge Tunnel construction – the historic railroad tunnel 700 feet under Afton Mountain. The tunnel that opened in 1858 for trains and reopened in 2021 (after two decades of cooperative restoration work) to walkers and bicyclists, was designed by French engineer Claudius Crozet, but it and the railroad were built by several thousand Irish immigrants and enslaved African Americans whose blood, sweat, and lives (at least 14 Irishmen and 3 slaves died during construction) turned Crozet's idea into one of the greatest engineering feats in the world at that time.



Fragments of Staunton's Past in Newest Book by Charles Culbertson

Take a load off your feet and sit down (you'll know where) to enjoy the latest history book by author and historian, Charles Culbertson. The *Staunton, Virginia Bathroom Reader* is flush with fascinating and fun tidbits from the Queen City of the Shenandoah. For decades, Culbertson compiled many stories about the history of this area for *The Daily News Leader* and published numerous books on local history, including *Staunton, Virginia: A Treasury of Historic Takes*; *Our Century Together*; *Shenandoah Valley Memories*; and *Staunton, Virginia: Another Treasury of Historic Tales*. Along the way, he collected photographs and story fragments too short to put into a full-fledged article, but interesting glimpses into our city's past worth saving. As Culbertson comments on the back cover of his *Bathroom Reader*: "Got a busy Lifestyle? A short attention span?" He goes on to say: "This is just the book for you: hundreds of entertaining morsels of history . . . Here's humor, drama tragedy, quirkiness and even outright idiocy, from 1747 to the turn of the 21st century, all presented in short, digestible units."

The *Staunton, Virginia Bathroom Reader* can be purchased for \$20 at the R.R. Smith Center for History and Art, 20 S. New Street, Staunton, Va.



Gone ... But Never Forgotten!

SAVE THE DATES

You are cordially invited to attend the return of
“Conversations from the Grave: Meet the Residents
of Thornrose Cemetery,” September 20-21, 2025.

Guides will usher participants along the winding
pathways of Thornrose to meet some of the “spirited”
individuals who wish to share their stories of fame,
adventure, tragedy, and scandal.

More information in a future newsletter.
Tickets on sale summer, 2025.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

This widow played by Barbara Wimble, greeted tour groups in 2021, transitioning visitors from the world of the living to the dead. A Staunton elementary school is named after Bessie Weller, the city's first school nurse who dedicated her life's work to the schoolchildren she loved so much. Bessie is seen here portrayed by Melissa Dull in 2021.

Lorenzo Sibert, portrayed here by Hunter Hanger, invented a revolutionary, repeating firearm in the days just before the outbreak of the Civil War. The weapon never got into production.

A group of headstones in the older section of Thornrose.

The life and death in 1906 of circus performer Eva Clark is remembered each December by a mysterious admirer.

Photos taken by Lucinda Cooke.

Colonial Patriot-Hero George Moffett Subject of Spring Meeting

Sunday, May 18, 3 p.m.

“George Moffett: Augusta Patriot”

Program by Ray Wright, ACHS president

Sanctuary, Tinkling Springs Presbyterian Church

30 Tinkling Spring Dr., Fishersville

In the months from May to October 1774, a conflict ensued following escalating violence between white settlers who were moving into Ohio country, and Shawnees and Mingos whose disputes over hunting rights resulted in what is known as Dunmore's War. Virginia Colonial Governor, John Murray (4th Earl of Dunmore) was granted a declaration of war by the House of Burgesses in order for the Colony of Virginia to settle the dispute with the Indians by military force.

A key figure in Dunmore's War was George Moffett, a native of Augusta County. Born in 1733, Moffett played a prominent role in the French and Indian Wars and later in the

Revolutionary War. Speaker Ray Wright will trace Moffett's command at the Battle of Point Pleasant in Dunmore's War and the Battle of Guilford Courthouse in the Revolution. Noteworthy is the fact that the 1774 campaign was the last time an American colonial militia would fight under royal command in the service of the British king.

This presentation is part of the Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission (VA250) that serves to commemorate Virginia's key role in the 250th anniversary of American independence. In recognition of this important anniversary, programs like “George Moffett: Augusta Patriot” will encourage Americans to learn more about the founding of our nation.

Following the program, refreshments will be served and attendees will have the opportunity to visit the Tinkling Spring History Room.

As always, the ACHS Spring Meeting is free and open to the public.

Lucinda Cooke, Newsletter Editor

Call for Smith Center Front Desk Volunteers

Hello artists, art enthusiasts, and history buffs throughout Staunton and our neighboring communities! Have you been looking for a way to meet other “creatives” and the opportunity to enjoy new monthly art and history exhibits close to home? Are you interested in the amazing architecture of Staunton? Then, check out the R.R. Smith Center and become a Smith Center Front Desk Volunteer!

As a volunteer, you will be the first to watch as new exhibits fill the walls and floorspace in the SAAC and History galleries, and introduce visitors and locals to unique creative experiences and the stories and people who shaped our region's history. The Smith Center is a great place to stop and explore while on a stroll around the downtown, and the perfect spot to learn about our building as an integral part of Staunton's historic cityscape. You will also be a liaison at our front desk when visitors ask questions about the artwork and the stories in the galleries, or who come to attend lectures, workshops, and receptions. The Smith Center also includes classrooms and conference space, and a stunning outdoor garden where visitors can enjoy a tranquil spot in the heart of the city. Volunteers will see firsthand how the Augusta County Historical Society, Staunton Augusta Art Center, and Historic Staunton Foundation make the Smith Center a premier destination to access the history, architecture, and cultural vibes of our city and county.

Joining the volunteer team is a great way to start conversations with our featured artists, as well as, a wonderful opportunity for artists to dip their toes into the local art scene, make connections for future collaborations, find out where to learn more about the history of our area, or learn more about how gallery spaces run! We also offer a great space for artists and enthusiasts to be surrounded by work that their peers are creating and find inspiration for their own projects, or to find information and tools that can help you to fix up your own historic property by visiting the Historic Staunton Foundation resource center. Explore your local family history upstairs in the Augusta County Historical Society archives and library where archives volunteers can assist your search. The resources there are vast!

Have we caught your attention? Volunteer on our website: rrsmithcenter.org/support. We offer training Friday through Sunday and are ideally looking for coverage on Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday afternoons. However, any availability and help are greatly appreciated, even if you can't commit consistent days. In the meantime, feel free to stop in and check out our upcoming exhibits for 2025.

Nicole O'Connor, Smith Center Volunteer Coordinator

It's not too late for Annual Giving!

Now that our feet are firmly entrenched in 2025, I invite you to reflect on the tremendous achievements of the Augusta County Historical Society, culminating in the celebration of our 60th Diamond Jubilee in August 2024. At that time, ACHS unveiled the Compass Project, a partnership with the Community Foundation, to establish a long-term financial plan for the Society's future with the creation of a Legacy Giving program. As ACHS president Ray Wright said in his letter to the membership in November 2024, “our Annual Fund is a vital component of the Compass Project. . . Your annual giving sustains our daily operations and is vital to enabling your Society to carry out its mission. In addition to the day-to-day, your Annual Fund makes possible the preservation of important documents, photographs, and objects, as well as the presentation of exciting exhibits and exemplary programs. Your gifts provide our well-respected annual journal, our newsletters, and other outstanding programs and events for our members. Your generosity has brought us this far, and your continued annual giving will launch the Augusta County Historical Society into the future.”

We deeply thank all those who've already given generously to the Annual Fund, and invite those who may not have done so yet to make a gift to the Society's future. Your thoughtful consideration and support are paramount to ensuring that the Society's long-term financial master plan becomes a reality as we launch our next 60 years.

Lucinda Cooke, Newsletter Editor



At the December ACHS board meeting, long-time office manager, Mary Gooden was honored for her years of service to the Society. Her career spanned positions with the Frontier Culture Museum in the early 1990s, and many years as a bank manager for two area banks. She retired for a brief time before coming to ACHS in 2018. Mary is seen with ACHS president Ray Wright.



Meet the Newest Addition to Our Staff!

Maitlyn Ritter joined the Augusta County Historical Society in June 2024 as our office assistant, trained by long-time office manager, Mary Gooden. In January 2025, Maitlyn took over the role as office manager following Mary's retirement. She is delighted to be part of the team.

Maitlyn was born in Baltimore, Maryland, and moved to Staunton with her family in 2007. She attended Stuart Hall during middle school and then went on to graduate from Robert E. Lee High School (now Staunton High). Maitlyn received her bachelor's degree in English and interior design from Meredith College, and she received her master's degree in sports management from Georgetown University. Her early career was spent working in sports for the Washington Redskins (now Washington Commanders) and North Carolina Futbol Club, but soon realized her passion for nonprofits. Maitlyn moved back to Augusta County from Washington, D.C., in 2020, and she and her husband recently purchased their first home in Staunton after their marriage last year. Maitlyn loves to dance, enjoys long hikes, antiquing and thrifting, and binge-watching "Gilmore Girls." Stop by our office and say "hi" to Maitlyn.



Augusta Annals

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Nancy Sorrells, past president
Lucinda Cooke, newsletter editor
iamcindy@comcast.net
Maitlyn Ritter, office manager

The ACHS Individual dues are \$45,
Family dues are \$65, Student dues are \$20,
Institutional are \$100.

Members receive invitations to the semi-annual meetings, an annual banquet, the Stuart Speaker Series, notices about other special Society events and activities, and discounts on Society books, and some programs and tours. The dues include your exclusive digital copy of the *Bulletin*. Print copies are \$15 extra per year.

To become a member, send your check to:
Augusta County Historical Society, Attn.:
Membership, P.O. Box 686, Staunton, VA
24402-0686, or join on-line at
www.augustacountyhs.org.

Membership dues are payable in full upon joining. You will receive any current newsletters and *Augusta Historical Bulletin* published during your year of membership. Subsequent dues will be billed annually on the anniversary date you joined.

Return Service Requested

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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