



The Historian

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia
-- Preserving and Sharing Local History for 55 Years! --

Winter February 2019 Volume 24, Issue 1

Dear Fellow Members,

On December 8th I had the pleasure of being the keynote speaker for the SAR and DAR Commemoration of the Battle of Great Bridge which was held in the city council chambers of Chesapeake's City Hall. This was a great honor for me! Surprisingly, four days later, I was asked by Mayor Rick West to speak to Chesapeake City Council about the NCHSC, our Wallace History Room collection and about the Battle of Great Bridge. I can report that city council members know who we are!



Robert Hitchings, Keynote Speaker at Great Bridge Battle Commemoration

This past year has been eventful for NCHSC. We can look back with pleasure knowing we had some great programs. As your president, it feels so good when people call, e-mail or just stop by the Wallace Room and say, "Great program, Robert!" Our programs have been well attended and we continue to enroll new members. Our newsletters are getting better

too with added pictures and great local history articles written by our Wallace Room volunteers and newsletter committee.

In 2018 we also continued to add to our ever-growing collection of old and new photographs, family trees, rare books, and old and new maps. Also, in 2018 our Wallace Room volunteers answered calls from *Virginian-Pilot* reporters looking for information for articles related to local history. Board member, Raymond Harper and I have been contributing articles to the *Virginian-Pilot Clipper*, promoting Chesapeake's rich history. We couldn't ask for better advertising for the NCHSC than that!

Calendar of Events

February 2019

NCHSC Board Meeting
12 Feb 6:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
17 Feb 2:00pm

Library Closed
18 Feb

March 2019

April 2019

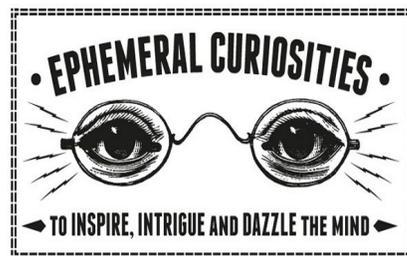
Library Closed
21 Apr

May 2019

NCHSC Board Meeting
14 May 6:00pm

NCHSC Membership Meeting
19 May 2:00pm

Library Closed
26 & 27 May



Wallace Memorial Room

Continued on Page 2

President's Letter, Continued from Page 1

For 2019, we welcome two new board members, Louise Franklin and Tom Whetstone. Louise and Tom are both Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Foundation board members as well as members of other historical societies. We look forward to their help and input on our board.

As we look back on 2018 with pride in our accomplishments, I feel sure 2019 will be even more successful. Thank you for your continued support and God Bless!

Robert B. Hitchings,
President, NCHSC

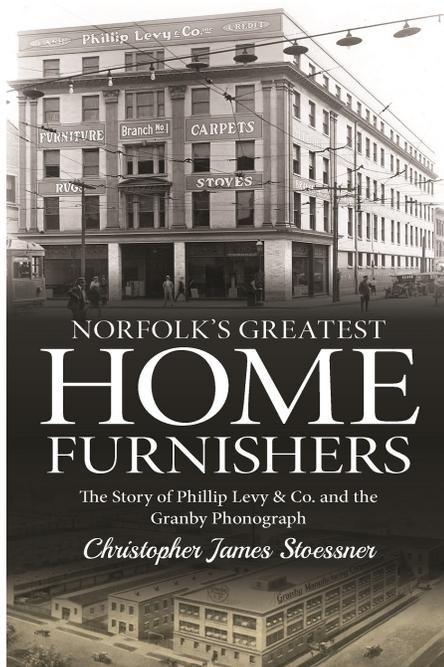


Volunteers Gail Harris,
Heather Barlow, and
Jim Curtain at
GB Battle Reenactment

Christopher Stoessner To Be February Guest Speaker

By Robert Hitchings,
NCHSC President, Archivist/Historian

Our February guest speaker will be Christopher J. Stoessner, author of *Norfolk's Greatest Home Furnishers: The Story of Phillip Levy & Co. and the Granby Phonograph*. Mr. Stoessner is a native of Newport News and is currently residing at the Outer Banks, NC. He developed an interest in history and antiques early in life, and by the age of 14, he was buying and selling antiques as a hobby. During this time, he stumbled onto a Granby Phonograph which sparked his curiosity about this long-forgotten aspect of Virginia history. The result is a complete written history of the Levy family's Norfolk-based enterprises, published in 2018. Come and listen to Mr. Stoessner as he talks about the story of Phillip & Harry Levy, early Virginia merchants who founded Phillip Levy & Co., a well-known furniture store in early twentieth century Norfolk, Virginia.



Professionally, Chris is a funeral director, embalmer, and crematory operator currently licensed in both NC and VA. He is the former owner of C. J. Stoessner & Co. in downtown Smithfield, VA and is a member of the Jamestown Society and Sons of the American Revolution.

Our general meeting will be at the Chesapeake Central Library on February 17th, 2019 at 2:00 p.m. Light refreshments will be served as always. Come and support the NCHSC with your presence and bring a friend!

A Tribute to Chesapeake's African-American Police Officers

By Paul Sutton,
NCHSC Board Member & Wallace Room Volunteer

Typically, during Black History Month, Americans recognize famous and well-known African-American leaders in our communities. I want to take a different tack here and recognize locals who have served our community well. I served for 27 years as a Police Officer for the City of Chesapeake alongside many black officers who served with distinction -- Joe Perry, Jessie Diggs, Kelvin Wright, Tracey Branch, Keith Dent, Alvina Caldwell, Isaac Cooper, Windsor Brabson, Tim May, Hattie McIntyre and many more. I want to recognize three officers in particular.

Cliff Pierce was my academy classmate and we worked the same shift. At times I found myself in danger, in over my head, with no backup coming. Cliff had a sixth sense and was always looking out for me. He would show up on his own initiative and come to my aid when I least expected it, rescuing me from harm.

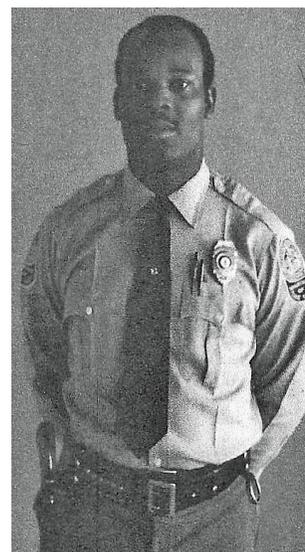


Officer Alma Felton

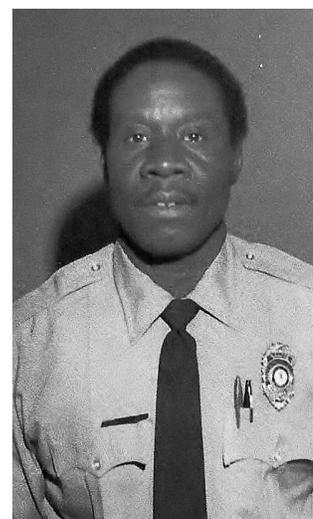
Alma Felton was Chesapeake's first black female officer. She and I worked in Western Branch, the only officers on duty in a large area. She always had my back and I could count on her 100 percent.

Nat Handy and I worked in South Norfolk, at that time the highest crime area in the city. We dealt with dangerous incidents and violent people regularly. Nat was always there, looking out for me, making sure I went home at the end of my shift.

I have a great deal of respect, admiration, and affection for these three fine officers because they are part of MY history. Each assisted me in fights and arrests of violent offenders. Were it not for them, their bravery and awareness, I might not be here today. But they didn't just protect and look out for me, they protected and looked out for all of us and our city. They deserve praise, respect, admiration, and recognition for that.



Officer Cliff Pierce



Officer Nat Handy

Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Museum Holds Soft Opening Ceremony

By Lori Pickett,
NCHSC Board Member & Newsletter Editor

A soft opening ceremony and reception to celebrate the newly-constructed brick, Georgian structure was held on December 8, 2018. The ceremony was extremely well attended by foundation board members, supporters and city dignitaries who anxiously await the grand opening which is tentatively planned for May of this year. Currently the Foundation still needs to raise around \$700,000.00 to build the exhibits.



City of Chesapeake Mayor Rick West Addresses Attendees at the GBBW Museum Soft Opening



Ribbon Cutting at Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways Museum

The Foundation's Historical Park includes an Interpretive Historic Pathway, an outdoor auditorium, a recreation of the Great Bridge causeway, a family picnic area, and a tribute to the British troops that lost their lives during the battle. The museum will house educational displays and artifacts, electronic media, and trained staff and volunteers to tell the story of the importance of the battle and the waterways.



Reception at the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways Museum

2018 NCHSC Annual Holiday Dinner – A Merry Time Had by All!

By P. S. Vredenburg, Wallace Room Volunteer

Photos Courtesy of Amy Williamson Jonak, Wallace Room Volunteer

Our NCHSC annual holiday dinners are traditionally festive, fun, and educational, and our 2018 dinner on December 5 was no exception. Held at *Traditions* at the Chesapeake Golf Club, we had a great turnout with lots of holiday sparkle. We were served paired entrees of pepper-crusted salmon and sesame ginger chicken with roasted potatoes and a vegetable medley, followed by a delicious coconut cake.

We wish to thank our guest speaker, author and historian Greg Hansard, who shared stories based on his latest book about the more than 800 German sailors who lived at the Norfolk Navy Yard from 1915 to 1917.



Kay Ziegler, Wallace Room Manager
and Sam Leary, Volunteer

Trapped by Allied ships in the Atlantic and in need of repairs, two German raiders, the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, found a safe haven at Hampton Roads. To occupy their time and build public trust, German sailors built their own miniature German village, visited relatives and friends, and attended social and cultural events in the area. Their little German village made the Norfolk Navy Yard a tourist attraction and a destination for Sunday outings in our area.



December Guest Speaker,
Greg Hansard



NCHSC Annual Holiday Dinner at *Traditions*
at the Chesapeake Golf Club

Our NCHSC goal for 2019 is to continue finding great local historians to fascinate and inform. Be sure to join us at our general membership meetings in February, May, and September, and save a spot on your calendars for our December 2019 annual dinner!



A Lovely Time Had by All!

Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake
298 Cedar Road
Chesapeake, VA 23322

Please check the date on your mailing label above to make sure your membership is current. Membership dues are due by May 31st.

Questions or suggestions? Email us at nchs.wallaceroom@gmail.com, call us at (757) 410-7152, or visit our site NorfolkCountyVAHistory.org. Date submitted (for your records) _____

Mayor Bill Ward Will Be Subject of African-American Exhibit in the Wallace Room

By Robert Hitchings,
NCHSC President, Archivist/Historian

In February, the Wallace History Room will be celebrating African-American History month by honoring our former mayor, Bill Ward. Bill was Chesapeake's first and only black mayor and served as Chesapeake's longest mayor from 1990 to 2004. Before he stepped down, Bill thoughtfully donated many of his personal records and other items of interest, during his time as mayor, to the NCHSC.

Bill was an active member of the Norfolk County Historical Society. We hope you and your friends will stop by to see our exhibit honoring our friend, Bill Ward, and to see what's new in the Wallace Room.



Mayor Bill Ward