



# The Highland Hourglass

A newsletter published quarterly by the Highland Historical Society



Volume 9

McDowell, VA

Fall 2006

## HIGHLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Preserving  
Highland County's Past  
for the  
Enrichment of  
Present and Future  
Generations*

### Board of Directors

Clay Hamilton Acting president  
Lorraine White Vice president  
Sarah Samples Secretary  
Margaret A. Ralston Treasurer  
James Blagg  
William Crisp  
Tim Duff  
Larry Held  
Donovan Hower Sr.  
Chris Scott  
Tate Swecker  
Nancy Vance

### Staff

Crysta Stanton,  
Executive Director

Post Office Box 63  
161 Mansion House Road  
McDowell VA 24458  
Phone: 540.396.4478

Email:  
highlandhist@mgwnet.com  
Website:  
highlandhistoricalsociety.com

### Upcoming events ...

**November 12**  
Annual General Membership Meeting  
Highland County Public Library  
2 p.m.

**December 9**  
Annual Christmas Open House  
Highland County Museum and Heritage Center  
6 p.m.

### Look on the back cover...

For our annual fund-raising campaign form. Please mail in your donation today to support the endowment fund and the general operating fund.

## Changes ...

have been a constant element in the Highland Historical Society this year. Some of the changes have been very challenging, while others were extremely rewarding.

The society began the year with the hopes of raising \$185,000 to purchase the **New Hampden Mill**. Volunteers and staff searched for an appropriate funding opportunity for the society. However, the September deadline came without success. No grants could be obtained for the purchase price. After a request for an extension on the Mill contract was denied, the board decided it best to approach donors about returning their generous donations. To date, most Mill donors have positively responded that the society keep the donation and use it for either the endowment fund or the general operations fund. (See Page 6) Please look in this edition for the annual fund-raising campaign envelope. The society operates from year-to-year on what is raised during this campaign.

Earlier this year, an afternoon celebration was held marking the museum's **first anniversary** of being open to the public. That evening, the Highland Historical Society celebrated The Mansion House (which houses the Highland County Museum and Heritage Center) being named

See CHANGES, page 2.

## Looking ahead ...

to 2007 - a year that promises stabilization and measured growth. The priority will be securing the museum's future.

For the past year, the Highland Historical Society's board of directors has discussed developing an **endowment fund** to ensure the continued operation of the society and the Highland County Museum and Heritage Center. Recently, a savings account was opened to begin receiving donations for the endowment. Some donors who had given to the New Hampden Mill project have decided to earmark their donation for the endowment fund and a balance of about \$2,000 is resting in that account.

In addition to establishing the endowment fund, the board of directors has also set fund-raising for the **general operations fund** as a priority. On average, it costs about \$5,000 per month to operate the museum. On the back cover of this newsletter you will find our annual fund-raising campaign form. On it you may make a donation and join the society or renew your membership.

See AHEAD, page 2.

---

**From CHANGES, page 1**


---

to the **National Register of Historic Places**. Most recently, several other outbuilding sites have been identified on the property. These other sites — a well, a spring house, a granary, an ice house, and an equipment shed will be included in an amendment to The Mansion House's National Register status. Amendments to National Register nominations are frequent as researchers continually learn about historic sites.

This summer, board members **Diane Klein, Mike Wilke, Sara Bell, Judy Marks, Roger Orndorff, Lynette Armstrong and Janet Mullenax** resigned from the board of directors. This change obviously presented great challenges to the remaining board members, staff and the organization as whole. Perhaps the silver lining to this cloud is that the county and region has a new chapter of the Archeological Society of Virginia. After departing from the HHS, some of those named above established the Highlands Chapter of the ASV with Wilke as chairman.

As they say, for each door that is closed, a window opens. New members **James Blagg, Tim Duff, Larry Held, Don Hower and Nancy Vance** have joined the board. Two receptions were held prior to board business meetings to welcome the new directors. Each have attended board meetings and are settling into their new roles.

**The Highland Museum Store** has been open for nearly one year now. The store is a significant part of the museum and the visitor's experience here. The museum store has been showing a profit since June. Proceeds from the store go back to the general operations fund to support the museum. The mission of the museum store is to offer items for sale that will enhance the visitors educational and cultural experience at the museum. Such items currently include the Battle of

McDowell DVD, "The Battle of McDowell," by Richard Armstrong, prints of the original 1847 Highland County map, Victorian household items and items for children including a selection of folding fans and toy soldiers. In addition, several Highland-made items are in the shop such as Tom Dever's bird houses and Pat Lowry's framed maps of Highland County and Bud Cook's prints of the New Hampden Mill.

The museum collection continues to grow and change every day. Recent additions include a framed photograph of a portion of the old **Gardner Extract Plant** (formerly located on U.S. 220, south of Monterey); a functioning **Victrola**; the **Gum papers** that contains records of births, deaths and marriages in the Vanderpool area. The **Robert Sitlington Papers** which include documents for the first church in the McDowell area on the Bullpasture, The Union Meeting House, and founding documents for the brick Presbyterian Church.

The tourist season has nearly ended at the museum. However, to date the museum has hosted **nearly 2,000 visitors** in 2006. To host the visitors, volunteers were trained at sessions held once-a-month at the museum. During the summer, the museum was open five days a week and a **troupe of 12 regular volunteers** manned the exhibit rooms.

The culmination of all the changes throughout the year was received in September. Based on work done by Diane Klein, Mike Wilke and Sara Bell, The Highland Historical Society received the **Leadership in History Award of Merit from the American Association of State and Local History** for the restoration of The Mansion House.

---

**From AHEAD, page 1.**


---

The society depends solely on **donations from individuals, businesses and other organizations** for its operating expense and its endowment fund. Grant funding covers special projects in the museum such as the renovation of the building and outfitting the new Family History Research Room.

Work has begun on the **Family History Research Room** at the museum. A vacant room on the second floor will be outfitted with desks, tables and chairs for researchers. Shelves will line the walls with family history books, documents and maps. Two computers will be installed for on-line research and for copying photographs and documents. The board hopes the new research room will be open by Maple Festival.

In addition, the room serving as the society office will be

In addition, the room serving as the society office will be converted into **another exhibit room**. The office will be located in a small room adjacent to the Research Room. The new exhibit room will house a permanent exhibit on the history of Highland County, entitled "Uniquely Highland."

Planning is already underway for **McDowell Battlefield Days in 2007**. Military commanders, society board members, volunteers and staff, and community members met in September to begin laying the groundwork for the May 5, 2007 event. Preliminary planning indicates that the event will be set up a bit different this year. The battle scene may be held in a different location. Stay tuned for details.



## Secretary of Natural Resources visits Museum

L. Preston Bryant, Jr., Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources, paid a visit to The Highland County Museum and Heritage Center in June, acknowledging the recent listing of the Mansion House on the Virginia Landmark's Register and the National Register of Historic Places. Crysta Stanton, Executive Director, took Secretary Bryant and his guests on a personal tour, answering questions about our exhibits and the Mansion House.

Secretary Bryant oversees the Department of Historic Resources, the state agency that grants admittance to the Virginia Landmarks Register. Their mission is to foster, encourage, and support the identification, stewardship, and use of Virginia's significant historic, architectural and cultural resources.

The Highland Historical Society's application for the state and National Register was completed in-house by board vice-president Lorraine White and former board members Mike Wilke and Diane Klein.

The society celebrated the designation this May with a special reception for life members and special friends.



Secretary of Natural Resources, Preston Bryant, chats with Highland Historical Society Executive Director Crysta Stanton, while touring exhibit rooms at the Highland County Museum and Heritage Center.



*Save the date*

**McDowell  
Battlefield  
Heritage  
Days to be  
held in  
May 2007**

Plans are now underway for McDowell Battlefield Heritage Days 2007. The event will be held May 4, 5 and 6.

On Friday, May 4, all the activities will be behind-the-scenes, but a very busy day for the Highland Historical Society. Most of the 1,000 reenactors will be arriving and setting up camp. All these folks need to be parked and registered. A commanders meeting takes place Friday evening for the reenactors.

On Saturday, May 5, the event will be open to the public. The public schedule will begin with a wreath-laying ceremony to commemorate the 145th anniversary of the Battle of McDowell. The schedule will unfold as it has in years past with continuous living history, lectures and tours of the Highland County Museum and Heritage Center. The "Battle for the Village" will begin at 4 p.m.

On Sunday, May 6, the public schedule closes at noon following a period church service.

## *Volunteers are always welcome and needed*

The Highland Historical Society has many wants and needs with regard to operating the Highland County Museum and Heritage. Primary among them is the need for warm and willing volunteers. Volunteers are needed for the following:

**DOCENTS (tour guides)    HOUSEKEEPING    COLLECTIONS    RESEARCH**  
**MAIN OFFICE    GIFT SHOP    PRESERVATION    SPECIAL EVENTS**  
**MEMBERSHIP DRIVES    MCDOWELL BATTLEFIELD HERITAGE DAYS**

If you are interested in volunteering for any of the above, please contact Crysta Stanton at 396-4478.

## “Tol’Able David” enjoys revived popularity with new era of silent film buffs, hobbyists

**McDOWELL** – The silent film classic, “Tol’Able David,” was filmed in the Blue Grass Valley in 1921. Director Henry King was a Virginia lad from Christiansburg. He wanted a Virginia location for the outdoor scenes and chose Crabbottom. In the film, the village is called “Greenstream.” Many reviews of the day and recent reviews comment heavily on the beauty of the landscape and its rural nature.

Today, there is a growing number of hobbyists interested in silent films. “Tol’Able David” is rising in popularity again as new silent film buffs study this genre.

While the exterior shots were filmed in Crabbottom, the interior scenes were shot at the old Biograph Studios in New York, N.Y. In fact, the actors and film crew left New York by train for Highland. When they arrived in Staunton, they exited the rail cars and a caravan of automobiles carted the personnel and all the equipment to Monterey.

Many locals were cast in small parts, including Eldridge Swecker who was the sheriff of Highland County. He played himself in the film. His son, “Scoop,” was 12 at the time and can be seen riding a mule in one of the scenes. Others reportedly received a dollar a day to stand in crowd scenes.

Those viewing the film for the first time will recognize many of the buildings as they remain standing today.

Production in Crabbottom wrapped up in six weeks and the film company left town heading back to the hot streets of New York in summer.

Walter Coppedge’s article on “Tol’Able David,” in the film jacket reads “The film opened to reviews in New York and throughout the country with an enthusiasm which bordered on delirium.”



The sheriff of Highland County in 1921, Eldridge Swecker, played himself in the silent movie, “Tol’Able David,” which was filmed in the Blue Grass Valley.

The film elevated its leading actor, Richard Barthlemess (who portrays David) to stardom. Coppedge comments “Barthlemess became, after Valentino (whose career was just taking off), the country’s brightest young star.”

The film will be the focus of the Sunday, Nov. 12 annual meeting of the Highland Historical Society at the Highland County Public Library. The meeting will begin at 2 p.m.

During the annual meeting program, two 10-minute segment of the film will be screened followed by a panel discussion of the film’s plot, the event of the film company coming to Highland and the people involved in producing “Tol’Able David.” Stories and remembrances collected about the film will also be shared at that time.

### Society seeks information on the 1921 filming of “Tol’Able David”

The society is actively seeking those in the community who have stories, anecdotes or information about “Tol’Able David.”

If you do have tales to share, please contact society executive director Crysta Stanton at 396-4478 or send them to [highlandhist@mgwnet.com](mailto:highlandhist@mgwnet.com).

Hopefully, information gathered can be shared at the annual meeting and eventually used to create an exhibit at the Highland County Museum and Heritage Center on the film.

The society is tentatively planning to show “Tol’Able David” in its entirety for the community during the winter months.





## Our summer star: **Tiffany Armstrong**



The Highland County Museum and Heritage Center had a shining star this summer, Tiffany Armstrong (*left*).

Tiffany was employed 15 hours a week through the Highland Summer Youth Program. Among her projects she clipped old editions of *The Recorder* and created obituary files, greeted guests, helped with the museum shop inventory and sales, and painted the inside porch. The porch has now been cleaned and renovated as a designated place for workshops and educational activities. Please stop by and take a look at our new space.

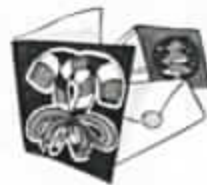
This is the first year the Museum and Heritage Center has participated in the Summer Youth Program and we are thrilled with the work Tiffany has accomplished this summer.

## HHS board participates in professional development

Dr. Katherine Brown, Adjunct Professor in the Historic Preservation Program at Mary Baldwin College and the incoming President of the Augusta Historical Society met with members of the Highland Historical Society Board of Directors on August 22 to provide Professional Development.

Experienced in working with museum boards, Dr. Brown is also the former Executive Director of the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace and the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton and the Stonewall Jackson Museum in Lexington. The workshop emphasized long-term planning and fiscal responsibility.

As a result, the HHS board is planning to hold a special meeting in January to formulate a long-term strategic plan.



## *Christmas time is drawing near*

The Highland Historical Society is preparing for the Second Annual Christmas Open House at the museum. The event will be held Saturday, Dec. 9 from 6-9 p.m.

Last year, the event focused on "Christmas in the 1860s." This year the theme will be "Christmas and Holiday Cards." If you have greeting or post cards dating to 1950 or earlier, and are willing to loan them for a temporary exhibit, contact:

Collections Chairman Lorraine White at 468-3470

or

Executive Director Crysta Stanton at 396-4478.

Father Christmas will pay a visit and read "A Visit from St. Nicholas" for the children. In addition, there will be planning carolers, holiday refreshments and a Christmas card craft table for children.

## Listen to the radio for "A Moment in History"

Have you heard our new "Moment for History" spots on Alleghany Mountain Radio?

Every month the Highland Historical Society is recording a radio spot highlighting a unique aspect of Highland County history.

Recent topics have included the Mansion House, the New Hampden Mill, historic Confederate Monuments and the 175 anniversary of Pisgah Church.

If you have a suggestion for an upcoming topic please contact the Highland Historical Society office at 396-4478.

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW**

for the

**2006 ANNUAL MEETING**

November 12, 2:00 pm

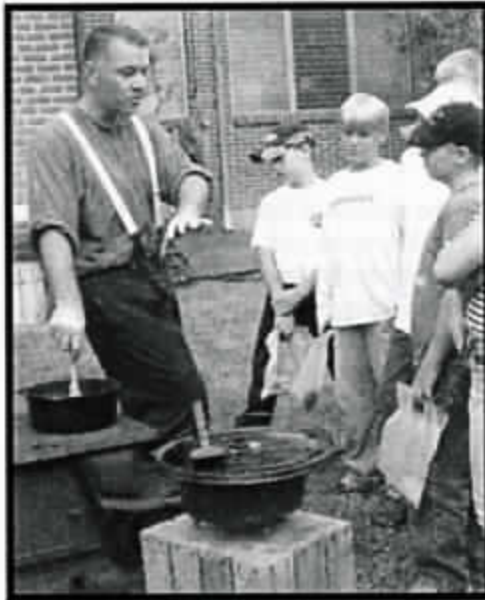
Monterey Library, Mountain View Room

Program:

**HOLLYWOOD IN HIGHLAND**

*"The filming of **Tolable David**"*

We will view film clips and hold a discussion



HHS board member Tim Duff demonstrates the art of campfire cooking to last year's fifth-grade class.

## Highland Elementary students take field trips to Museum

Students from Highland Elementary School visited the Highland County Museum and Heritage Center twice in 2006.

In June, the fourth and fifth grade classes under the instruction of **Caroline Botkin** and **Melody Moats** visited the museum.

Special education stations for erected for the youth. The classes were divided into four groups. The small groups watched "The Battle of McDowell" film with **Will Crisp**; visited the museum's exhibit rooms with **Sarah Samples** and **Lorraine White**; participated in a game station with **Chris Scott**; a food preparation

station with **Jim White** and **Tim Duff**.

Recently, new fourth- and fifth-graders came to the museum for a field trip in conjunction with Hands and Harvest Festival. Students got a peek at the museum special preparations for the fest and learned about Highland County's history.

The students viewed "The Battle of McDowell," with **Margaret Ralston**; took in the exhibits with **Sarah Samples** and also learned about old-time food preparation with **Jim White** and **Tim Duff**.

Students were also allowed to visit the Highland Museum Store to purchase mementoes of their visit.

## New Hampden Mill acquisition project falls short of goal

The Highland Historical Society took on the task of raising \$185,000 to purchase the New Hampden Mill in September 2005.

Volunteers and staff searched for an appropriate funding opportunity for the society to purchase the Mill. A Virginia Department of Transportation Enhancement Grant was identified as a potential funding source. However, in order to receive the grant an applicant must show its project's relation to surface transportation. The society's point of view was the Mill created commerce and transportation in the New Hampden community which was significant during its operation. Nonetheless, VDOT would not approve that rationale as an appropriate connection to transportation.

In the meantime, an application for a small grant from the Society for Industrial Archeologists was submitted. The SIA works to preserve and restore industrial buildings. However, this year the SIA received more than double the usual amount of applications and the Mill project was not among the awards.

Many private donations came in, and the society was able to forward payments to an escrow account set up for the Mill. Toward the end of the summer, the society learned of a grant opportunity with the Allegheny Foundation with a September deadline. The grant application and the deadline for conveying the purchase price on the Mill coincided. The society requested an extension to the original contract. It was not granted. In the end, the society was not successful in raising the purchase price



The New Hampden Mill near Blue Grass

for the Mill. The good news is that no money was lost. Every cent that had been paid on the Mill was refunded. All private were contacted and offered their money back. The majority wanted their donations to remain with the society for the benefit for future programs.

In a letter to the current owners, the society expressed an interest in working in an advisory capacity with a new owner, if he or she is willing to preserve the Mill.



## National award given to Highland Historical Society for preservation, restoration of Mansion House

PHOENIX, Ariz. – The American Association for State and Local History recently presented Highland Historical Society with its Leadership in History Award of Merit for the preservation and restoration of The Mansion House in McDowell.

The society purchased the home in 2001 with the intent of restoring the building and using it as a local history museum. That was realized in 2005 when the doors first swung open to the public. The museum is now in its second year of operation, but much work has yet to be done on the building and the property.

Our near-term plans include the installation of a research room in the museum and the construction of a replica of the original side porches. In addition, our long-term plans include an education center complete with restroom facilities. The center will be located behind the museum building.

One of the second-floor rooms will be converted into the Family History Research Room. Family history resources and copies of original documents will be available to genealogical researchers. Computers, printers and copiers will be available for patrons to use to access genealogical resources on the Internet and to make copies of the documents and photographs the museum has on file.

A brick addition built in the 1950s will be removed from the house and a replica of the original side, two-story sleeping porch will be constructed. In addition, an education building complete with restroom facilities will also be constructed at the rear of the property.

While there is much to do, significant strides have already been made. The electrical system has been upgraded and brought into compliance with the current code. All the walls have been stabilized and floors gently refinished to enhance the character of the original boards.

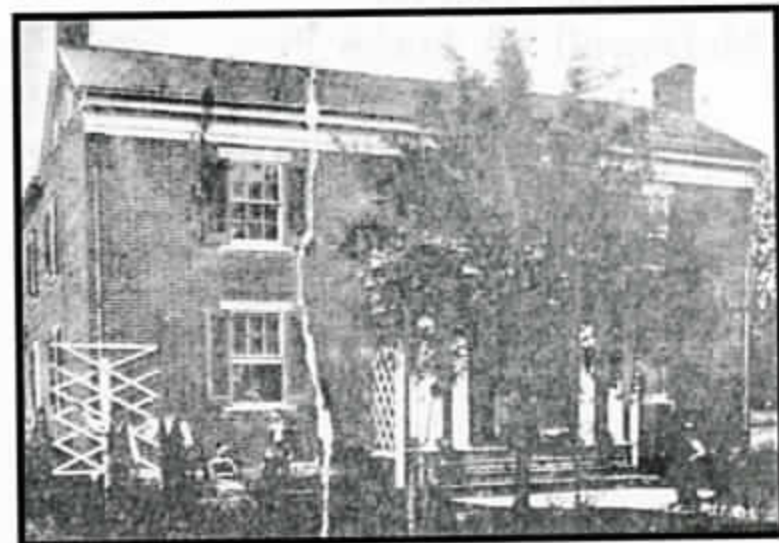
On the exterior, bricks were repointed and the window sills were stabilized. Period glass was placed in the windows. Gutters and downspouts were also installed. The focal point of the building, the front porch was also constructed. It is a replica of the original 1850s porch.

Application for the award was made earlier this year by former board members Diane Klein, Mike Wilke and Sara Bell. It is one of only two projects in Virginia given the Award of Merit. Nationally, 84 awards were bestowed on deserving organizations and individuals this year.

Award committee members commented that the Highland Historical Society's application was pushed through for the award because "this tiny organization had done so much with so little."



The Mansion House (above) as it appears today—the home of the Highland County Museum and Heritage Center. Below, the Mansion House in the 1880s, the beginning of its hotel era. The Mansion House Hotel was a stagecoach stop on the Staunton-to-Parkersburg Turnpike and welcomed regular seasonal guests.



Work on The Mansion House has been made possible through grants from the Save America's Treasures program, the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, the Proteus Foundation, private financial donations and numerous volunteer hours. The Mansion House is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

## Donation

Please accept my donation to the Highland Historical Society for the operation of the Highland County Museum and Heritage Center. Donors giving \$500 or more will have their names engraved on the "Friends of the Museum" plaque at the museum entrance.

|             |             |               |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| \$0—\$50    | \$250-\$300 | \$500-\$600   |
| \$50—\$100  | \$300-\$350 | \$600-\$700   |
| \$100—\$150 | \$350-\$400 | \$700-\$800   |
| \$150—\$200 | \$400-\$450 | \$800-\$900   |
| \$200—\$250 | \$450-\$500 | \$900 or more |

## Membership

Members of the Highland Historical Society will receive the society's newsletters and a 10 percent discount in the Highland Museum Store as well as membership cards. Business members receive a certificate to display. Life members receive all the above and invitations to special events. Patrons will be included on the "Friends of the Museum" plaque.

| NEW             | RENEWAL       |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Student—\$5     | Business—\$25 |
| Individual—\$15 | Life—\$250    |
| Family—\$25     | Patron—\$500  |

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City State Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ (The society's policy is not to share or sell member information.)

The Highland Historical Society  
 Post Office Box 63  
 McDowell VA 24458