

President's Desk... -- Ray Ezell

Hello Members and Friends... as I look back on 2024, I am grateful for your support and thankful for our ability to continue to offer interesting programming and to provide a venue for conducting historical research to our supporters and the community. 2024 was a productive year. A handful of our notable achievements are:

- Redesigned the Society's website with increased functionality and enhanced user experience. It provides an expanded online repository for FREE research materials and past publications
- Received a significant grant from the Virginia Museum of History and Culture to conduct research on the pre-Civil War free Black population of Orange County
- Substantially increased the number of historic Orange County Review negatives cataloged (of a collection of about 15,000)
- Conducted a history bus tour for new county school teachers
- Reached an agreement with the James Madison Museum to collaborate on artifact and document collections shared between our organizations
- Conducted a successful fundraising campaign for needed gutter and roof repair

On a somewhat sadder note, Jean McGann, a research assistant at the Society since 1997, retired at the end of 2024 after a long and fruitful tenure. She always had a pleasant greeting for our visitors, and with her goes an untold amount of institutional memory that will be difficult to replace. She has assured me that she will continue to attend our events and may even volunteer from time to time.

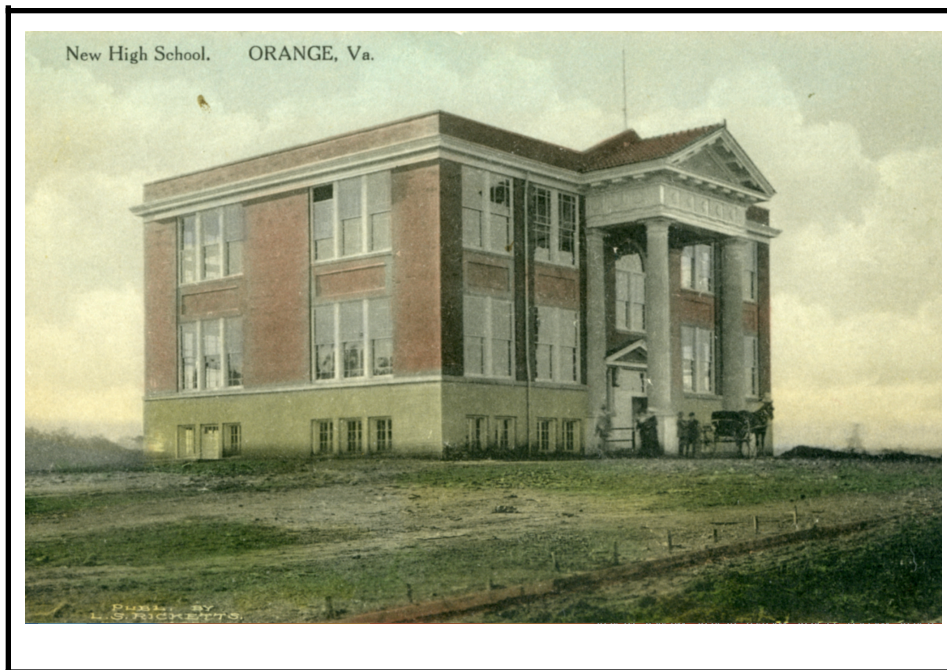


General Store at Raccoon Ford Post Office, ca. 1925

This coming year marks the 60th year since our Society was organized. We plan to appropriately commemorate the occasion, and we will continue to enthusiastically tell the stories of Orange County to our community. I hope each of you uses 2025 to get involved in the Society to the extent you are able. The lifeblood of any organization is volunteerism from its members. Although we have a paid part-time staff, more remains to be accomplished. Some areas that we can use your help are: Special Events Planning, Contributing to the Newsletter/Oracle, Growing Membership, Fundraising, Recruiting Volunteers, Planning Programs, Digitizing Collections, Conducting Local Research, Beautification of our Facility, or Board of Directors Service. If this interests you, **please reach out directly to me at rayezell_2000@yahoo.com.**

Treasurer's Report – James Luther

We greatly appreciate the continuing and generous support of our members and other donors, as well as the Town of Orange and Orange County for their re-occurring grants. All of these contributors allow us to operate our facility and meet operating expenses. Membership dues at various levels, a grant from the Virginia Historical Society, our roof fund raising campaign and additional donations in 2024 totaled \$34,584.33. Our income from all sources in 2024 was \$37,908.18, and our expenses were \$44,176.53. We began 2025 with \$13,690.16 in our checking accounts, in addition to our investment assets of over \$373,000. Our investments in 2024 were increased approximately 8% over 2023. We continue to meet our financial obligations and have a solid financial footing from which to continue serving the community through our programs, research efforts, and publications.



Orange High School Postcard, ca. 1925

Committee Reports

Building and Grounds – Patrick Colby

2024 was a relatively uneventful year for the committee. Most efforts entailed routine repairs, maintenance, storage improvements and coordinating exterior clean ups. The year's significant repair project (performed by contractors) was the replacement of gutters at the front of the building and a more durable repair to the gutter at the rear of the auditorium. Looking ahead, bids were solicited in hope of modernizing the building alarm system in 2025.

Collections – Ann Miller

Collections Committee: Over the past year, the OCHS Collections Committee has continued to examine various practices to organize our research collections. The African-American obituary project continues to grow under the care and supervision of Ruth Mallory Long, who originated the project. Regarding our non-paper collections: the ornate 19th century plaque from the old Liberty Mills bridge has been properly cleaned and given an appropriate protective coating, and research is continuing on several older pieces of artwork in our collections.

Great progress is being made on the organization and indexing of the Orange Review and Duff Green negative collection files, as well as other smaller file groups. Shelving dedicated for the negative files has been designed and built. Particular appreciation is due to Patrick Colby, Darryle Crump, Joe Wayner, Patty Parmer and Carla Passarello for their work on this and related projects in 2024. In addition, thanks to Carla's generosity we also have a number of sturdy new metal rolling shelves that are in use in the vault, storage room, and the rear portion of the auditorium, as well as facilitating the moving of files and objects as needed.

Library – Ann Miller

We continue to organize our existing OCHS library books and to identify new potential additions to our collections. Suggestions by our members and friends continue to be helpful in finding new items. Our ongoing Free Black research project, in particular, has helped us identify a number of volumes on Black history that have been earmarked for future acquisition. In addition, the OCHS library has been the beneficiary of a number of donations from members and other individuals during 2024. These range from single volumes to groups of multiple volumes with relevance to local history, families, places, and events.

Education – Linda Carlton, Jennifer Conley, Rod Hawkins, May Saxton, Jess Thompson

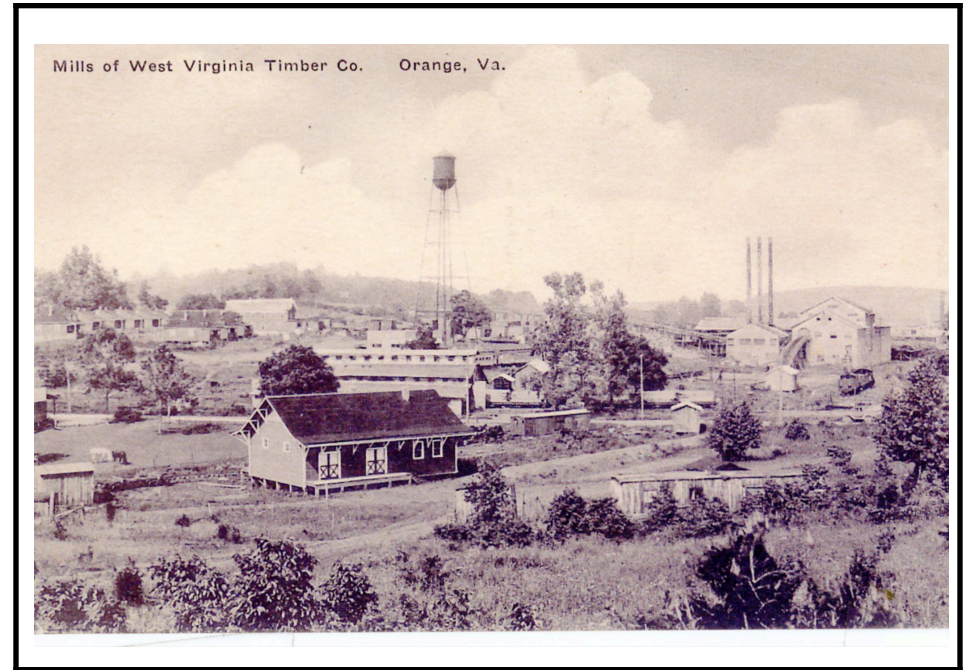
During 2024, the Education Outreach committee continued to support the history teachers in the Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) in their quest to teach a comprehensive history of the United States supported by the richness of local history.

- Free Society membership continues to be available for history teachers in grades 4-12. Teachers have access to all programs and resources offered by the society to members.
- During the New Teacher Institute for the 2024-2025 year, Society members narrated a county bus tour for all new teachers, noting areas and items of local historical significance.
- The Educator Resources section of the website contains approximately 115 articles with plans to add more. Teachers are invited to submit questions and/or topics to be researched by the Education Outreach Team.
 - For fourth grade history students, a coloring book, “The Nine Lives of an Orange Tabby” is distributed to the county’s three elementary schools. In this coloring book, the story of Orange County is shared as seen through the eyes of Purr, an orange tabby cat with nine lives. The reprint was made possible through the generous sponsorship of Carol Couch, a past president of the Society.
- Our team met with OCPS administrators to discuss possible collaborative projects including a multimedia contest to increase

student awareness of the United States Semiquincentennial (250th Anniversary) at the elementary and secondary levels.

- OCHS and the James Madison Museum plan to collaborate on our future support of local history teachers.

Our committee always welcomes additional suggestions of ways to support our local teachers.



West Virginia Timber Company Postcard, ca. 1910

Membership – Mike Saxton

Notable Membership Committee items mark a successful year in member retention and growth.

- Our membership growth remains steady and healthy. Since its adoption in January 2022, the five-year strategic plan has placed a focus on achieving mission priorities and increasing “member value”. We believe this focus has contributed to a steady 3-year increase from 162 to 340 active members today. While the number of free Educator members has naturally remained steady, the growth has been driven by more than doubling dues paying members from 117 to 280 during this same period.
- Membership from around the country has increased over the last 3 years from 15 to 23 states with 17% of dues paying membership outside of Virginia.
- The Family Research computer is being upgraded to a new easier to use genealogy workstation. As a Family Research Affiliate Library, members have expanded online access to original genealogical records from around the world that are not available from home.
- We continue to be the only local historical society in the area offering free membership and support to Orange County social studies teachers who teach history.

Program – Ray Ezell

The previous year provided a number of interesting programs & picnics, held on Sunday afternoons. Several of these programs were held at off-site venues to generate broader appeal. These included the Holladay House tour, History of North Pamunkey Baptist Church, Marshall Farms’ robotic dairy farm, and the annual commemoration of Governor/General James L. Kemper’s birthday at Walnut Hills. In the Society’s Sandra and William H. Speiden auditorium, presentations were given on Historic Germanna’s archaeological research results, the Battle of Chancellorsville, Russ Roberts’ recollections of becoming a pilot in Orange County, the Culpeper Minutemen during the Revolutionary War, masonry rehabilitation of the Menokin house near Warsaw, Sandra Speiden’s contribution to historic preservation, results of recent 3D scanning and modeling of the historic Barboursville house ruins. Most of our in house

programs were live streamed for a remote audience, and they were well attended. Continue to pay attention to program announcements in future editions of the *Orange Oracle*, our Facebook page, and by email. If you have ideas for program topics or venues that the society can visit, please contact Ray Ezell.

Publications -- Lynne G. Lewis

The Publications Committee had a good 2024, producing our newsletter, *Record*, sending 12 issues of the *Orange Oracle* to our members and educators, and in April, welcoming a new book: *The Register of Free Blacks for Orange County, Virginia (1803—1850)* by Ann L. Miller.

Ann Miller’s latest contribution to the history of Orange County is the transcription of the Register of Free Blacks that was kept between 1803 and September 23, 1850. The dated registration entries—which include names, ages, and descriptions of each individual—are transcribed, indexed and include men, women and children. Published in a format that makes them readily available for the first time, these records are a valuable addition to our knowledge and understanding of Orange County. The original pages, kept in the Orange County Circuit Court Clerk’s office, are fragile and are not available to the public. With the cooperation of that office, however, the images of those pages have been placed at the Library of Virginia so that researchers who wish to view the original handwritten entries can do so.

Research – Ray Ezell

Several areas of research were initiated or expanded in 2024. These included collaboration with the Orange Co. African American Historical Society on black veterans of Orange County, identification and transcription of documents pertaining to 19th-20th century Orange County postmasters, identification and genealogy of commercial businesses in downtown Gordonsville, and continued refinement of commercial buildings’ genealogy in downtown Orange.

The Society was also one of 14 organizations state-wide chosen to receive a grant from the Virginia Museum of History and Culture’s (VMHC) Commonwealth History Fund. The Society was awarded \$6,000 to conduct

research and compile an inventory of free Blacks in Orange County from 1734 to 1865. Our research staff continues to respond to basic genealogy

and research requests almost daily via email, telephone, and in person requests from visitors and patrons.

Finance/Investments – Bill Speiden

The Society's investment portfolio remains strong and well balanced and saw healthy growth.

- On 12/31/2024 our investment portfolio balance was: \$374,230.83
- On 12/31/2023 our investment portfolio balance was: \$343,131.85
- Portfolio increase in value \$31,093.98 = 9% increase
- Cash amount added to investment account = \$2500
- Amount withdrawn from account = (-) \$13,297.15
- With our withdrawals --> 12.16% percent increase
- Cash in Money Market account= \$14,553.89 currently yielding 3.8%

Volunteer Support – May Saxton

During 2024, eleven society members have answered the monthly "Call for Volunteers" to serve the Orange County Historical Society for a total of approximately 400 hours. This number does not include the multitude of hours that members of the Board of Directors contribute to the work of our society. Volunteer projects have included indexing the Orange County Review negatives, scanning the African-American obituary collection, organizing and scanning society files, scanning family files, scanning the historical files of the Orange Woman's Club, conducting an inventory of society books offered for sale, and transcribing and indexing an 1883-1884 Rapid Ann general store ledger. Many thanks to Jayne Blair for coordinating our volunteers on-site at the research center.

As we look forward to 2025, we would like to increase the number of members who volunteer. What would interest you? Ideas are very welcome! Stay tuned to the "Oracle" for 2025 volunteer opportunities.



Craun Brothers' James Madison Texaco Station on the site of the Orange County Historical Society, ca. 1940



Orange County Historical Society

Annual Member Meeting

2024 Annual Report

January 26, 2025

Orange County Historical Society, Inc.

130 Caroline Street

Orange, VA 22960-1533

<http://www.orangecovahist.org/>