Mathews County Historical Society

Preserving Mathews History

Winter — *Celebrating our 61st Anniversary* — 2025

An Update On The Thomas James Store

If you've walked or driven down Maple Avenue this winter, you probably noticed that the Thomas James Store is safely ensconced on new brick piers and has been lifted above potential stormwater runoff.

During the process of stabilizing the building, Storybound Construction needed to remove part of one of the original hand-hewn structural beams that had deteriorated badly. Thanks to dendrochronology or tree ring studies, we know that this wood was harvested in 1820. That allows us to establish the year in which the oldest part of the building was constructed. This wonderful old store, owned and maintained by the Mathews County Historical Society, is one of the oldest surviving mercantile establishments in the American southeast.

When the Thomas James Store opens to visitors this Spring, new interpretive signs will be on display. These signs summarize the store's early history and its evolution architecturally. They also include images that will serve as a guide for those who tour the building. The QR codes on some of these signs, and replicated in an interpretive brochure, will allow the interested visitor to learn more about the store's architectural features. Thanks to a grant from the Mathews Community Foundation, the Thomas James Store's easternmost shed addition will have three signs that describe the numerous ways in which African Americans, both enslaved and free, played an important role in Mathews County's economy.

1. *The Thomas James Store after it was lifted and placed upon new and higher brick piers.*

2. *One of the Thomas James Store's original beams. Note the deterioration of the wood, harvested in 1820.*

3. *A close-up of the original interlocking corner beams that supported the Thomas James Store. Note their interface with the store's easternmost shed addition, built around 1899.*

A Message From The President

Reed Lawson

The Mathews County Historical Society is entering 2025 with gratitude for all that was accomplished during 2024, and with renewed energy for the projects that lie ahead.

Thomas James Store lift, in the capable and patient hands of project manager Marsha Carlton, will be completed this spring. Martha McCartney, assisted by skillful graphic artist Lois Biddison, has updated the interpretive signage that describes how the building evolved structurally and the important role it played in the community. A grant from the Mathews Community Foundation has facilitated this work. Building & Grounds chairman John Hoffman and former TJS Curator Roger Emig provided able assistance throughout this project.

Thanks to our dedicated and energetic volunteers, MCHS members have served as docents and decorators at the Tompkins Cottage, cleaned up Tabernacle Road, made a parade float, and served as Board members and committee chairs.

During 2025 the MCHS and the government of Mathews County will continue seeking the funds that are need to lift the Tompkins Cottage above the reach of floodwaters. John Hoffman is overseeing this project. The society and county have sought – and will continue to seek grant funding. If successful, the society will launch a capital campaign to raise funds to supplement the county allocation.

The Tompkins Cottage Museum was the scene of two holiday open houses – Thanksgiving and Christmas. Many thanks to TC curator Diane Vogel, docents Cindy Kloke and Roger Emig, photographer Ray Stubblebine, and to Martha McCarney, Trish Reed and Hunt Thompson, who decorated the TC for Christmas.

The MCHS Board extends a hearty thank you and best wishes to TJS Curator and Acquisitions Chair Roger Emig on his recent resignation and, also, to retiring two-term treasurer Hunt Thompson for his capable handling of the Society's financial reins. Many thanks go to Diane Vogel and George Overstreet for agreeing to stand for election at the Annual Meeting.

A gentle reminder: January is membership renewal month.

In the year ahead, we have many projects that will require funds and volunteers. We cordially invite you to renew your membership and encourage others to join the historical society.

Author Benn Trask gave an interesting and informative presentation on Mathews County lighthouse keepers. Thanks to MCHS program chair Amy Baker for organizing this well-attended event.

MCHS youngest member Eloise Leslie, our Blue Crab, rides in the skiff built by the late master boat builder Edward Diggs of Redart. Amy Baker, Liz Bateman, John Hoffman, Martha McCartney, Martha Story, Ray Stubblebine and Hunt Thompson worked on this project.

In Memoriam

On a somber note, we mourn, with Board member Mary Beth Almond, the passing of her daughter, Joan, in October. *Pax vobiscum*.

MCHS Board of Directors

Governance Committee

MCHS will be electing officers and new members of the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting and Dinner, February 12, 2025.

Proposed Slate of Officers:

Reed Lawson, president; Amy Baker, vice-president; Martha McCartney, secretary; George Overstreet, treasurer.

Incumbent Board Members:

Class of 2025:

Liz Bateman, Terri Hyman, Reed Lawson, Martha McCartney, Tim Morgan

Class of 2026:

Mary Beth Almond, Amy Baker, Marsha Carlton, John Hoffman

Class of 2027:

George Overstreet, Ray Stubblebine, Diane Vogel

Also on the ballot is an amendment to the Bylaws:

Dissolution – If the Society should ever cease to exist as a corporation, any assets above and beyond that amount required to meet the obligations of the Society shall be dispensed of by the Board to a nonprofit organization(s) or institution(s) with a mission(s) similar to the Objectives of the Society. In no event shall any member benefit from such assets except for authorized expenses incurred in conducting Society business.

MCHS Annual Dinner and Meeting

Wednesday, February 12 6:00 p.m.

Kingston Parish House
370 Main Street, Mathews, Va.
$30 per person
Payable to the Treasurer P.O. Box 855
Mathews, VA 23109 or at the door
Menu
Caprese Salad
Filet of Beef with Horseradish Sauce
Grilled Salmon with Dill & Lemon
Seasoned Roasted Baby Potatoes,
Zucchini & Squash Medley
Cobbler with Ice Cream
Coffee, Tea, Water & Wine

RSVP by February 1st
scotslass6@gmail.com, or 804-725-5249

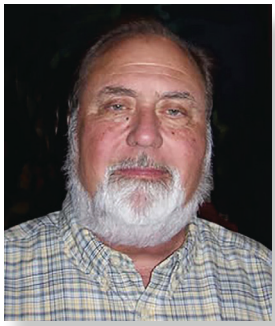
Introducing Board Candidates

Diane Vogel, a Mathews County native, returned to the community about 10 years ago. For the past year she has been serving very capably as the Tompkins Cottage Museum's curator.

Diane has a bachelor's degree in Sports Medicine from the University of Virginia and a Master's Degree in Health Promotion and Behavior from the University of Georgia.

Currently, she is the Director of Recruiting Services for TekStream Solutions, an IT Consulting Company in the Atlanta area. Diane is excited about promoting the history of Mathews County and connecting people to the past through our programs.

George T. Overstreet, a Portsmouth native, served in the U. S. Air Force. He attended the College of the Albemarle and graduated from Old Dominion University with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. After employment with the General Electric Company, he worked as Criminal Investigation Division Special Agent for the IRS. He is a former treasurer and past commodore of the Mathews Yacht Club and has agreed to serve as Mathews County Historical Society's new treasurer.



Winter Party

Saturday, January 25th

Home of Cindy and Jack Kloke
5:00 pm to 7:00 pm
451 Queens Creek Rd, Hallieford
Bring friends and a savory or sweet dish.
Beverages are provided by MCHS

RSVP by January 20th
scotslass6@gmail.com or 804-725-5249

Upcoming Events

Recognizing and Sharing Family Treasures

by

Bessida Cauthorne White,
Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical and Historical Society
Saturday, February 15, 2025
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
First Baptist Church
9654 Buckley Hall Road, Mathews
Sponsored by Mathews County Historical Society and First Baptist Church
Free and Open to the Public

Saturday, January 25th
Winter Party *5:00 pm to 7:00 pm*

February 12
MCHS Annual Dinner & Meeting *6:00 pm*

February 15
Recognizing and Sharing Family Treasures *10:00 am*
First Baptist Church

March TBD
Tompkins Cottage Docent Training
Tompkins Cottage

April 5
Tompkins Cottage & Thomas James Store
Open for the Season

May 2
Music on Maple Ave
Thomas James Store

Mathews Archives
at Mathews Memorial Library

Mathews County Historical Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 855
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