



Bulletin

*Historic Downtown
building decal for
121 W. Main St.,
circa 1898, funded by
Friends of Cville
Downtown. Photo by
Sterling Howell.*

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Bringing History Back to Downtown

“Where’s all the history?” That was the driving question when we first met Michael Caplin and Greer Achenbach from the Friends of Cville Downtown (FCD) over a year ago. FCD is a local non-profit citizen working group created in 2021 to improve downtown Charlottesville’s social and economic vitality. Toward their goal of making downtown Cville “better-than-ever,” FCD asked ACHS how we can make more of our rich local history more visible and accessible for visitors to

the Downtown Mall. While we were walking the Mall one day, Caplin said, “We have SO much history, but here where so many visitors come, they don’t see it.” Since those conversations we’ve been working with FCD on a multifaceted strategy to better showcase and promote our community’s deep and complex history in the heart of the city.

It began with a research project. The FCD wanted to place markers on the historic buildings along the mall, noting the years they were constructed, to give visitors to our city a sense of the deep

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122 E Main St Ghost Mural Restoration Street Party Celebration held Friday, 9/8/2023, photo by Tom Chapman.



Dr. Dickens and participants on the new Barbers of Cville “Door to Door” Local History Tour 10/4/2023, photo by Tom Chapman

history that exists here. They also took the lead in coordinating the preservation of the ghost murals on the side of 122 E. Main Street, and FCD is thinking about creating a virtual reality assisted tour. But first things first — they needed to know the exact year for the various buildings and what stories could be told about them. That's where we came in. And, we turned to our secret weapon, Dr. Michael Dickens — a retired local pediatrician who, among many other interests and accomplishments, is an avid local historian, author, and serves on the ACHS Board of Directors.

Dr. Dickens began pouring over local history books such as James Alexander's *Early Charlottesville* (1878) and Wood's *Albemarle County in Virginia* (1901), the 1898 Charlottesville City Directory,

old *Daily Progress* articles, historic landmark surveys, and many other sources. Over the course of a few months, Dr. Dickens collected names, dates, and stories associated with the spaces and structures along what is today the Downtown Pedestrian Mall and turned them into 43 compelling vignettes about life in Downtown Charlottesville throughout its history. We are now working to publish Dr. Dickens' narratives in a book with the working title *Door to Door: Stories from Downtown's Main Street*. The ACHS and our friends are busy trying to bring history back to Downtown. Look for the FDC's new decals along the mall, [check out our new tours](#), keep an eye out for Dr. Dickens' forthcoming book, and much more! For more information, email programs@albemarlehistory.org.

Is it History or is it the Matrix?

With contributions by Steve Rundle
and ChatGPT.

Once upon a Friday afternoon in the ACHS library, the phone rang ... it was a researcher asking if we have any information about a murder trial in Charlottesville around fifty

to seventy-five years ago. Normally when these research questions come in, volunteers like Steve go through the painstakingly meticulous task of digging through our vast collection of historical documents in search of the most comprehensive and accurate answer possible. But this time, Steve thought — “just for fun, let's

see what ChatGPT will say.” After typing in the question, the AI churned out a synopsis for a book, a murder mystery/legal drama allegedly authored by John Grisham. Interesting, but not what Steve was looking for. Steve, could have just ignored the answer and typed in a slightly different question, or could have returned to the traditional research process. But, being the curious and unrelenting investigator that he is, he decided to look up the book. What he found was that it didn't exist. The title that the deep learning

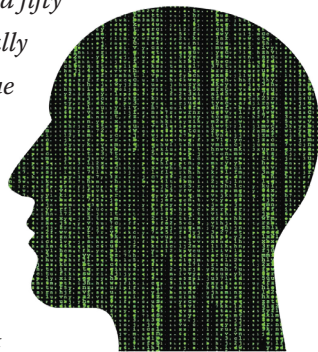


Image above credit: rawpixel, Creative Commons License

algorithm cited is nowhere to be found Grisham's extensive body of work. Drawing a connection between the search terms “Charlottesville,” “trial,” “murder,” etc.; the AI synthesized descriptions of novels by the local legal thriller author and invented an imaginary book out of whole cloth.

****Public service announcement: Never ever trust Large Language Models when it comes to historical research****

The lesson was learned, but Steve enjoys crawling deep down the rabbit hole. So, when preparing this newsletter, Steve was asked to contribute a volunteer perspective, and out of curiosity and good humor, he turned once again to ChatGPT. The following is what Artificial Intelligence thinks about volunteers at the ACHS.

A Link from Past to Present: Volunteers Help Preserve Our History

Volunteers are an integral part of the Historical Society, dedicating their time and skills to highlight the significance of our local heritage. They play a vital role in supporting the many services and programs the Historical Society offers. Putting in long hours, they actively engage with the community, preserving historical sites and stories that define our local identity. They serve as community ambassadors, fostering a sense of belonging and pride in our shared heritage while bridging the gap between the past and present. Our volunteers extend warm greetings and create a welcoming environment at the library, encouraging exploration and learning. Their commitment ensures that visitors receive the assistance they

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need, connecting them to valuable resources and knowledge. The Hatton Ferry, a remarkable historical artifact, is maintained and operated by dedicated volunteers. This immersive experience, available during summer weekends, allows visitors to relive the past by traversing the James River near Scottsville. Through meticulously crafted guided tours, volunteers breathe life into Charlottesville's stories, sharing intriguing narratives and contextualizing significant landmarks. Their passion for local history ignites curiosity and deepens the connection between residents and their surroundings. By shedding light on hidden gems and historical events, volunteers enrich the collective knowledge and appreciation of our community's past. As the heart and soul of the Historical Society, they make invaluable contributions that cannot be overstated. Their unwavering commitment, collaborative efforts, and profound passion empower the preservation of our history and inspire a shared sense of community. They remind us that history is not static, but a living testament to the enduring spirit of our community. The Historical Society is sincerely grateful for the invaluable contributions from these remarkable people.

The fake book fiasco aside, we have to completely agree with ChatGPT on this one. Thank you, Steve, and all of the other volunteers, for all you do! You truly are "the heart and soul of the Historical Society." We will not be replacing you with robots ... at least not anytime soon.

If you would like to explore history's mysteries with Steve, before the machines take over, email programs@albemarlehistory.org.

A Nickel for the Slot or a Body for the Plot

{And now, for a real murder story}

By Sabrina Fairley

{Sabrina interned at ACHS this summer, during which time she came across this story while archiving VA Bureau of Vital Statistics, Birth and Death Records in our manuscripts collection. You can see more about Sabrina's internship in Vol. 40, No. 1}

Amongst the mass of local records of deaths from the early 1900s are histories of sickness, tragedies, and murders right here in Albemarle County. One such murder was that of Frederick Page Morris, a 23-year-old well digger from Proffit.

On January 13, 1934, Fred Morris was talking with a group of other men at a gas station when Fred Pritchett and John Henry Leake came in intoxicated. Pritchett and Leake began playing a penny game machine, but then wanted to play a machine that required a nickel. Pritchett asked the attendant for change, but there were no nickels. He then asked the group of men. Morris pulled out all the coins in his pocket and showed them to Pritchett; to which Pritchett said, "I don't want that, I want a nickel." Morris's next, and last, words were, "That's all I have." Pritchett responded, "You're a liar!", pulled out a 32-caliber

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Volunteer Needs – Join us!

Email programs@albemarlehistory.org or call (434) 296-1492

- ♦ **Tour Guides** for our guided history walking tours.
- ♦ **Researchers** to help us answer the numerous inquiries we receive.
- ♦ **Oral History enthusiasts** to help Addie Patrick with our Going Digital project.
- ♦ **Cvillepedia.org** to help make it the go-to resource for local history.
- ♦ **Greeters** to provide ACHS hospitality to every guest that walks through our doors.
- ♦ **Hatton Ferry** operators and history ambassadors **for next season**.
- ♦ **IT** help for our internal network, databases, websites.



pistol and shot Morris in the left side of his skull, killing him instantly. The witnesses fled the scene. When the police arrived, the drunken Pritchett and Leake were still there, but had attempted to hide the murder weapon in a nearby honeysuckle bush. Pritchett was arrested for murder, and Leake as an accessory after the fact.

Leake had his day in court first, on February 16, 1934. He was found guilty of accessory to murder and unlawful obstruction of an officer in the discharge of official duty. But on appeal, his punishment was reduced to a fine of \$100 for the accessory charge, and

\$200 for the obstruction. The ultimate lenient sentence may be due to the fact that Leake's father was a well-known, well-liked reverend. Fred Pritchett faced the court on February 18th. When he was found guilty of murder, Pritchett had the audacity to ask the judge to "set aside the aforesaid verdict of the jury and grant him a new trial upon the ground that said verdict is contrary to the law and the evidence and upon the further ground that the punishment in said verdict is excessive." Seeming unmoved, the judge sentenced

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The Fuel of My Genealogical Journey

By Dr. Shelley Viola Murphy

As a genealogist, my passion for uncovering the past and the thrill of discovery are what drive me. However, when I first moved to central Virginia in 2003, I had no inkling of any connections to this rich historical landscape. I soon learned that a number of fellow researchers and community members were deeply invested in local history and with the historical society. With their diversity of knowledge and shared enthusiasm, it became necessary for me to be involved.

Initially, my research did not encompass the local area; however, a revelation a year ago illuminating previously unknown links underscored the importance of the society to me. The historical society has not only been a treasure trove of information but also a nexus for like-minded individuals, a place where the past is revered, and the stories of ancestors are brought to light. My involvement has enriched my research, fostered invaluable connections, and deepened my appreciation for the intricate stories that form the fabric of our community. I found my family!

The ACHS is more than just an organization to me. It's a vessel that brings the stories, victories, and lessons from our



Photo by Sanjay Suchak, Office of University Communications, UVA.

past into the present, giving our community a sense of identity and belonging. I care a lot about making sure that these stories, which help us understand and appreciate our history, are available to everyone. By giving up my time and energy serving on the ACHS board, I can take an active role in this project, helping to keep our historical treasures safe for future generations and bringing our community closer together. Being a part of such a meaningful mission gives me a lot of satisfaction, and it makes me want

to keep volunteering with the ACHS.

The ACHS is a small nonprofit; it relies on its dedicated members to keep the doors open, preserve our rich heritage, and continue fostering a community of learning and discovery. Every contribution, big or small, plays a pivotal role in ensuring the preservation and accessibility of the stories of our past. The support of each of us is truly essential. Your support will be a valuable investment in furthering the important work of connecting our past to our present and future. Will you contribute today?

You can support local history by making a donation at:
www.albemarlehistory.org/support/.

Pritchett to 20 years in the state's penitentiary, including time served. According to the Federal Census, however, Pritchett was out of prison by 1940. In July of 1949, he killed again. This time, although he plead insanity, he was sentenced to execution. He sought clemency from President Truman to no avail. Pritchett was put to death in Washington DC on February 15, 1952, and buried in

Maple Grove Christian Church Cemetery in Proffit.

As for the original victim, Fred Morris left behind a wife and two-year-old daughter. Morris's wife, Olive, never remarried, she worked at the Farmington Country Club, and died in 2001 at the age of 88. Morris's daughter, Mary, also stayed local, married and had two children. Fred Morris is also buried in Maple Grove Cemetery.

In the News



Photo by Tom Chapman

What's in a Name?

On August 22nd in the Swanson Room of Central Library, we partnered with Charlottesville Tomorrow to host *Renaming History: a conversation about the names we give institutions*. Reporter Tamica Jean-Charles moderated a congenial but impassioned panel discussion with Chuck Moran, whose great aunt was a namesake of Burnley-Moran Elementary School; Karen Waters, director of community education at Albemarle County Public Schools; and Lorenzo Dickerson, local

storyteller and documentary filmmaker who helped identify and commemorate the first 26 African American students to desegregate Albemarle County Schools. All involved agreed that we should have more local history conversations like this one facilitated by the ACHS and *Charlottesville Tomorrow*.

From the ACHS Library: Is Geography Destiny?

Have you seen the ACHS website lately? If not, go to albemarlehistory.org/library

and scroll down to **Coming Soon**. Our library volunteers have been busy helping to inventory and create our online catalog – the pamphlet collection should be finished by the end of 2023. And coming soon the website will have a **map page!** Not only will you be able to look up all the maps we have in our collection here at ACHS, there'll also be links to other repositories with digitized local and Virginia maps. In the meantime, while we're building the new map page, check out the preliminary inventory on the library page.

Party like it's 1933!

On September 15th, we joined WCHV to celebrate their 90th anniversary. L&J' catering provided the food and Big Ray and the Kool Kats set the mood. Harold Dubroff provided his fine craftsmanship to be auctioned. And, then there was Joe Thomas in a kilt ... Thanks to a very generous donor, all tickets were free. If you missed it, don't worry, the 100th anniversary is only ten years away, and you can still take part in remembering WCHV's 90 years on the air by checking out the 90-for-90 news stories we recorded at wchv.com/wchvs-90-for-90.

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In the News

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Who were the Dukes?

If you've taken a Maplewood Cemetery Tour before, you've likely learned a little about the prominent local Duke family. But for visitors to the ACHS Library, the people in the portraits hanging on the south wall have for many years seemed ghostly mysterious. But now, if you are curious, you don't have to ask, you can read for yourself. Thanks to the generous support of Lucy Duke Tonacci, the Duke family portraits have been restored and we have added interpretive signage to accompany them. To learn more, visit the ACHS Library and consider taking a Maplewood tour.

Short Summer on the James

We got off to a real good start at the Hatton Ferry back in the spring. We had a great group of volunteers who learned the ways of the river quickly and we made lots of new friends while traversing the James. But, we weren't singing sea shanties for long. After two fun and beautiful months, mother nature reminded us how fickle she is and how small we really are. In mid-July, a big storm swelled the river over 17ft, breaking the lock, and dumping the ferry in the parking lot of the Buckingham landing. Thanks to Ricky Allen and his heavy equipment, we got her back in the water, and thanks to Structural Steel Management for repairing much of the damage. But unfortunately, that July 19th ride back from Buckingham was the last time the ferry crossed the James this summer. Since then, the long dry spell kept the river below 4ft (our lower limit). Our season ends on October 15th, so it looks like we'll be waiting for spring before the Hatton Ferry

can cross the mighty James again. It was short but sweet; thank you to everyone who volunteered at the ferry this year, and let us know if you'll help again in 2024. If you're interested in volunteering or just learning more about the historic Hatton Ferry, email hattonferry@albemarlehistory.org and follow <https://www.facebook.com/HattonFerry>.

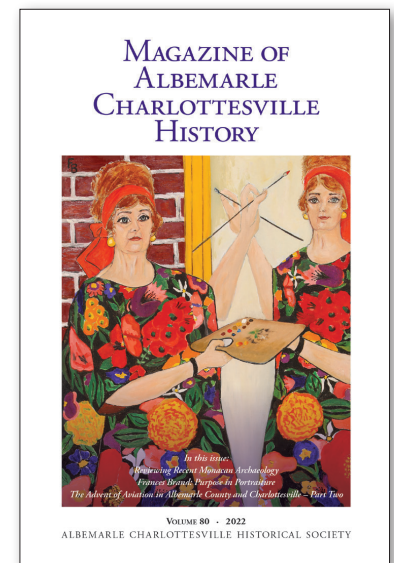
Hollymead House: Local History in your Neighborhood

October 15th — We step into the past to uncover fascinating local history in the cozy neighborhood of Hollymead. Among the oldest structures in Albemarle County, the 240-plus year-old building has been a home to Hessian prisoners of the American Revolution, a private residence of a long-time UVA Dean, one of the longest operating inns and restaurants in the Commonwealth, and now a bed & breakfast. If you missed out, we hope to reveal some local history in your neighborhood soon. If you know of any historic places in the city or county that might be willing to open their doors to the ACHS, let us know at programs@albemarlehistory.org.

No Playbook plays on

Saturday November 11th, 8am-4pm at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, we'll be taking part in a free in-person professional development program for teachers organized by the UVA Center for Liberal Arts and sponsored by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations. The program features a great line up of presenters from the worlds of sports and

education including Derrick Alridge, Project Director Education, Philip J. Gibson Professor of Education, Affiliate faculty member in the Carter G. Woodson Institute for African-American and African Studies at UVA; Robert Johnson, Grandson of late Dr. Robert Johnson, former tennis coach of Althea Gibson; Tom Chapman, ACHS Executive Director; Abby Farson Pratt, Web Studio Director, Journey Group; Lorenzo Dickerson, founder, Maupintown Media; Bonnie Hagerman, Assistant Professor, General Faculty of Women, Gender & Sexuality at UVA; and Paul Harris, Associate Professor Education and African American Studies at Pennsylvania State University.



The Magazine

The 2022 *Magazine* has been shipped! And, the 2023 volume is in the works. The *Magazine* represents an important and tangible part of our mission — to collect, preserve and interpret. Please consider a gift to support the *Magazine of Albemarle Charlottesville History*. Contact Tom Chapman at executivedirector@albemarlehistory.org or 540-222-9956.

On the Calendar

Sign up for virtual events on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/ACHistSoc or email us at info@albemarlehistory.org with questions and for additional information.

- **Guided History Walking Tours** – By appointment, Court Square, Maplewood Cemetery, the Downtown Mall, and Special Themed tours offered all year round. \$8/person. Contact Sterling at programs@albemarlehistory.org or 434-296-1492.
- **October 11, 6pm at The Center at Belvedere – Tangible Pieces of the Past: Interpreting Monticello through the Archaeological Record.** This presentation will introduce participants to the world of archaeological research at Monticello, providing an overview of the archaeological work done near Thomas Jefferson's house as well as off the mountaintop, and explain how the artifacts recovered from these excavations provide scholars with critical pieces of information about the people who occupied this landscape before and during Thomas Jefferson's lifetime. Register to attend at: thecenterville.org/calendar/event/96609/19.
- **October 15, 3pm-5pm - Hollymead House: Local History in your Neighborhood.** Join us to learn about the evolution of the property from current owners William & Pam Calary, about the building's architectural history from Prof. Richard Guy Wilson, and enjoy the rare opportunity to tour this unique historical structure (www.hollymeadhouse.com/history). Bring your own lawn chair or blanket, bring a picnic, enjoy the fall air, a musical ensemble, and explore the house and grounds. Tours of the house will take place starting at 3pm. Historical presentations will begin at 4pm with the house open again for tours after the presentation. Purchase tickets via Eventbrite: www.eventbrite.com/o/albemarle-charlottesville-historical-society-58390893993
- **October 24, 5pm at JMRL Central Library Swanson Room – THE ANCESTORS BECKON: HOW WILL WE RESPOND?** Historian & Genealogist Pam Smith in conversation with ACHS Executive Director Tom Chapman. This program started with a voicemail. Pam Smith, the caller, asked if she could use the ACHS research library to film where she researched her ancestors. Tom Chapman called her back to say of course you can, and a wonderful rambling conversation continued between two public historians that ended with the seed of a program planted to explore Pam's work and film with the local Cville community. Pam Smith is a native Chicagoan with ancestral roots in Charlottesville. She has a passion for unearthing buried African American stories. She is producing a short educational film about historical truth-telling directed by Loria King that features her enslaved Charlottesville ancestor, Matilda Lewis Threlkeld. Come and join us for this conversation. Please note, this program will be filmed and portions of it may be used in the educational film.
- **November 7, 6pm at The Center at Belvedere – What is the Virginia Lewis & Clark Legacy Trail?** Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville are connected to the legacy of Lewis and Clark (and their families') Virginia story,

providing an opportunity for further collaboration with local community partners to add to and benefit tourism in our community. Join us for a presentation with Margaret Crosson and Jim Johnson, Board Members for the Virginia Lewis & Clark Legacy Trail (VLCLT), who will provide a brief history of the trail project; the why and how for its development and organization among participating Virginia counties and municipalities, including a review of documented historic sites and recent discoveries along the trail. Register to attend at: thecenterville.org/calendar/event/103632/19.

- **November 11, 8am-4pm at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center – Race & Sports, UVA Center for the Liberal Arts (CLA) professional development program for teachers.** How can sports help us teach central moments and concepts in US history? This in-person program will feature the ACHS's new oral history website **NO PLAYBOOK** and scholars from the University of Virginia and elsewhere discussing the role of sports in the history of desegregation in Virginia. Multimedia resources will be demonstrated, discussed, and made available. The program is free for all middle and high school teachers, with breakfast and lunch provided. Register to attend at: cla.virginia.edu/program/race-and-sports.

HOLD THE DATE for these upcoming programs:

- **December 14, 6pm at The Center at Belvedere – ACHS Speaker Series with Professor Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Making #Charlottesville: Media from Civil Rights to Unite the Right*.** The alt-right's 2017 Unite the Right rally put the resurgence of aggressive, empowered white supremacy and far-right extremism in the Trump era on display, along with the antiracist and antifascist movement in opposition to it. Bodroghkozy examines the meanings and significance of this seminal moment in recent U.S. history by putting it into dialogue and comparison with key media events of the civil rights era, particularly the 1963 Birmingham and 1965 Selma campaigns. What can a comparative historical analysis of media treatment of these events separated by fifty years elucidate about the significance of what happened in Charlottesville? Bodroghkozy argues that what happened in Charlottesville in 2017 serves as a warning about the fragility of all the democratic gains achieved in the civil rights era and its aftermath.
- **January 23, 6:30pm at The Center at Belvedere – ACHS Annual Membership Meeting with Professor Risa Goluboff, Dean UVA School of Law.** Will speak on the legal history of the white supremacist and anti-Semitic violence that took place in her hometown of Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11 and 12, 2017, as well as a meditation on the process of writing such a history. Details TBD.



ALBEMARLE CHARLOTTESVILLE Historical Society

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS AND NEW MEMBERS

Our Society is built on the generosity of Our Members!!

Without YOU there is no ACHS. Renewals will be sent out on the anniversary of your original membership registration. For those members who have already renewed for 2023, we thank you! For ALL MEMBERS, recommend us to your friends, family, coworkers, and anyone who shares your passion for local history. Every person has a story to tell, and every member ensures that the ACHS will be here to collect, preserve, and interpret those stories.

Join us through our website www.albemarlehistory.org or give us a call (434) 296-1492.

Join now!

Our Vision

Our vision is to reimagine and reinvent the role of the historical society in the twenty-first century: to be a strong civic organization that embraces, in all that we do, the diversity of our community's history and experience, and promotes a greater understanding of our past, to enlighten the present and foster an inclusive history for future generations.

Our Mission

History is not the past; it is the story we tell about the past. Every person in Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville has a unique and powerful story to tell. Through collecting, preserving, and interpreting the history of our community, we are committed to informing, inspiring, and bringing together all people, creating opportunities for new relationships and new understandings.

Our Values

Our work is grounded in a belief in the worth and dignity of every human being. We respect people, communities, and cultures. We value discovery, creativity, integrity, and diversity. We believe in the potential for history to enrich our lives and to create stronger relationships and more vibrant communities. We approach our work with integrity and transparency.