



NEWS AND NOTES

from

The Fauquier Historical Society

Vol. 17, No. 1

WARRENTON, VIRGINIA

Spring & Summer, 1995

An Enduring Historical Treasure

Fauquier's Old Jail Museum

A prominent feature of Courthouse Square in Warrenton, the Old Jail remains as one of the most complete and interesting examples of early penal architecture in America.

Remarkably, the Old Jail served as Fauquier's detention center for over 150 years; by the time it was replaced by a new facility in 1966, it was believed to be one of the oldest jails in Virginia, if not the United States, still in continuous use.

The origins of the Old Jail go back to the earliest days of Fauquier County. As one might expect, the history of the jail and the courthouse it served are closely connected.

Shortly after Fauquier County was chartered 1759, officials began organizing and planning for the future of their new jurisdiction.

The first Court for Fauquier County was held on May 24, 1759, in a private residence; at the second session a month later, it was ordered that Sheriff Joseph Blackwell advertise for bids to build "a Courthouse of wood" and a jail to house prisoners of the county.

Plans moved quickly, and by the August 23 session, contractors were chosen "to lay off two acres for the Courthouse and Prison of this County to be erected on."¹

The site selected for the original courthouse and jail was "between the cemetery and the residence of Mr. Moses Green," most likely near the center of what is today the newer section of the Warrenton Cemetery.

Construction was financed by the sale of tobacco, which had been paid to the county at the rate of "24 pounds per Poll."²

There was significant controversy about the design of the new buildings.

One group wanted the county to



West walls and gate of the Old Jail, by William FitzSimmons (1965).

build cheap, utilitarian structures, while others wanted a more substantial courthouse and jail, both built of brick. The argument for frugality prevailed, but only temporarily.

A Series of Early Buildings

Construction of the first courthouse and jail was begun in early 1760. Elias Edmonds was selected as the contractor.

The jail, a square wooden building measuring "12-ft. by 12-ft. in the clear"³ with a chimney in the center was accepted by the county on April 24, 1760.

Cost to the county was 73 pounds, 15 shillings.

The 24-ft. by 16-ft. clapboard courthouse erected nearby was accepted at the same time. It cost the county only 24 pounds, 18 shillings, and eleven pence.

Sheriff Blackwell was dissatisfied with the first jail, which he considered "insufficient," and protested to the Court.

Other officials complained about the courthouse as well, and plans were soon started on replacement structures.

The court ordered a second jail to be built at its July, 1763 court session.

It awarded a contract to Armistead Churchill to build the jail, which was to be completed by the November court meeting. Churchill was given detailed specifications, and the cost was set at 105 pounds, 15 shillings.

Records disagree on whether or not this jail was ever built. Regardless, another contract to build a jail was negotiated with William Pickett, Jr., in July, 1765.⁴

Pickett's jail was a small building, measuring only ten feet square, and

(Continued on Page 3)

Old and New Societies Have Much in Common

The Fauquier Historical Society of today is not the same society formed in the county in early years of this century, nor is it a direct descendent of that organization.

But the members of both the old and new historical societies are kindred spirits, dedicated to uncovering, protecting, and studying the unique history of Fauquier County.

The First Society

The original Fauquier Historical Society was started in 1915 by a group of county residents committed to the specific purpose of promoting historical research.

The greatest concern shared by the members of the original society was that most of the existing historical informa-

(Continued on Page 6)

History Lesson In An Old Paint Chip

Editor's Note: During the recent renovations to the 1822 building, a sample of old paint was supplied to the Duron Paint Co. by Mr. Robert McMeans, the contractor.

Following is the reply sent by Valmar Laboratories, of Beltsville, MD which analyzed the paint chip.

Looking for lead and other elements in the paint, the chemist at Valmar uncovered many interesting details about the old building.

Dear Mr. McMeans:

We have completed the analysis on the paint chip that you furnished to Duron. The results are quite interesting.

The sample from your job, the Old Jail Museum in Warrenton, contained at least 14 layers of paint.

The bottom layer of paint was probably a low level (less than 2 per cent) lead-base substance, somewhat comparable to a modern primer. It contained cut horse hair and jute fibers, probably used as a filler.

The oil vehicle in this layer was more than likely a rendering from domestic animal fat, too badly decomposed to be sure. This layer is of unknown age, certainly over one hundred years old.

The next several layers indicate that the wall was whitewashed with a lime and water solution, approximately every

few years.

These levels do not contain enough substance to properly estimate age, but would probably cover about sixty years of maintenance.

The fourth layer from the top shows signs of creosote and smoke stains, either from a fire in the building, or from a wood fire, possibly a heat source.

There are also some smoke stains within this same layer that may indicate that the sample was exposed to either a coal fire or coal oil lantern.

This very thin layer contains incomplete material to date, but if I had to guess, would say that it is about seventy to ninety years old.

The third layer from the top is an early oil paint of high quality, containing several fibers which I identified as china bristles (hog hair) from the painter's brush. The paint contained a low level of lead filler (less than 2 per cent) and had shellac as a vehicle.

This layer contained urea, indicating that the sample was exposed to urine, which may have resulted from an overflowed toilet.

There is also ample evidence to suspect that this level of the sample was exposed more than once to a water source, over several years.

The aging of the surface of this layer indicates that this wall in the building

had little or no maintenance. This layer was over sixty years old.

The second level from the top was a lower grade oil based paint which probably contained tung nut oil as a vehicle.

No preparation was made before this layer was painted over.

This is the paint layer that is causing most of the cracking and peeling to appear on the walls and ceilings of your job.

The cracking is caused by the lack of proper maintenance of the layer of paint below this layer, and the aging of the surface of the prior layer.

This layer is approximately thirty-five years old.

The top layer of paint is a very low grade of oil paint, and judging from the weathering of the surface is over twenty years old.

I would guess that this paint was a local store brand paint.

I hope that you have found this as interesting as we did.

Duron only sends us the tough cases. This one was a mystery to be solved!

Robert E. Wills
Valmar Laboratories
Beltsville, MD

From Our Correspondents:

To the Editor:

Nancy Chappellear Baird and Carol Jordan, 3307 Cobbler Mountain Rd., Delaplane, VA 22025-9604 are trying to find the burial place of soldiers buried in Fauquier County from the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

We need to know the unit with which they served, where they were buried and dates of birth and death.

In Vol. I of our *Fauquier County, Virginia Tombstone Inscriptions*, we included a list of Civil war soldiers.

We have found more which we will include in Vol. II. There are 250 unknown Confederate soldiers buried under the Confederate monument in the Warrenton Cemetery, whose names, unit, and dates of birth and death we would like to have.

Nancy C. Baird
Delaplane

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Correspondence should be directed to:

The Fauquier Historical Society	Telephone:
P.O. Box 675	(703) 347-5525
Warrenton, Virginia 22186	

Newsletter Staff:

Chairman and Editor: John T. Toler	Hon. Chairman: Isabelle S. Palmer	Genealogist: Phyllis T. Scott
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Old Jail

(Continued from Page 1)

lacked the chimney of the earlier design.

It cost the county 51 pounds, 17 shillings and six pence, plus 15,950 pounds of tobacco.

It is believed that this jail, known as the "Debtor's Prison," was located on present-day Main Street, on the site of the F&M Peoples Bank Administrative Offices.

Prisoners were allowed to leave the cramped jail for exercise, but had to stay within strict boundaries.⁵

In the meantime, the county's second courthouse was built, this time on Culpeper Street.

It was completed in 1764, on the lot where the Hon. Lucien Keith later built his home. (The property is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hitchcock.)

In December, 1766, a committee was appointed to undertake the building of a more substantial jail next to the new courthouse.

This third jail was built of 12-inch logs, and measured 18-ft. by 16-ft. There was a central chimney, and fireplaces in each room.

But by 1778, this jail was in very poor condition,⁶ and the court ordered a new jail to be built.

Although the exact location of this fourth jail is uncertain, it is believed to have been built near the back corner of the present General District courthouse.

The contractor was Martin Pickett, who turned the completed structure

over to the county on July 27, 1779.

By 1789, the courthouse on Culpeper Street was in such poor condition that court had to be held once again in a private home.

In late April, 1790, the Court began plans to build a new, 52-ft. by 30-ft. brick courthouse on property in front of the jail, and to negotiate "for as much ground (so as to include the gaol) as they may think necessary."⁷

There were numerous delays, and the new courthouse "on the Public Square in Warrenton" was finally accepted by the county in October, 1795.

It would serve until yet another courthouse was built on the site in 1818.

The 1808 and 1822 Jail Buildings

In the meantime, the county replaced the smaller 1779 jail with a new jail, built at the rear of the courthouse.

In the Fauquier Minute Book, an entry for October 18, 1808, reads:

"The Commissioners appointed by the Court to superintend the building of the jail reported to the Court that they have received the jail in ample order and that the keys are delivered to the Court, and by the Court, delivered to the sheriff."

The single-pile, two-story jail measured 44-ft. by 20-ft., and was built of hand-made brick. The structure had two cells on each floor, accessible by a center hallway.

The facade consisted of three doors on the first floor and three six-over-six windows on the second floor.

The center door afforded access to

the second floor by a simple stairway.

Prisoners were brought directly into the room-like cells on the first floor through the doors on either side of the center door. (An architectural survey done in 1972 suggests that the staircase from the kitchen to the rooms upstairs may have been salvaged from the 1779 jail.)⁸

By 1821, the jail was found to be too small, and plans were drawn for an addition.

Another problem to be addressed was providing housing for the jailor, so that he could be present at the jail at night.

The following year, the commissioners contracted with John Kemper to convert the 1808 building into the jailor's residence, and built a new, stone jail behind it.

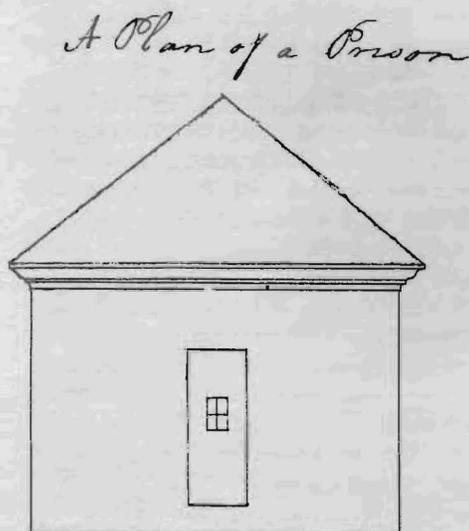
The addition was parallel to the existing jail, and connected to it by an enclosed area, with entrances at either end.

It was further specified that the new jail would have a foundation two feet thick, to prevent possible escapes. (One could say that the County got more than its money's worth: later surveys showed that the west wall is almost four feet thick.)

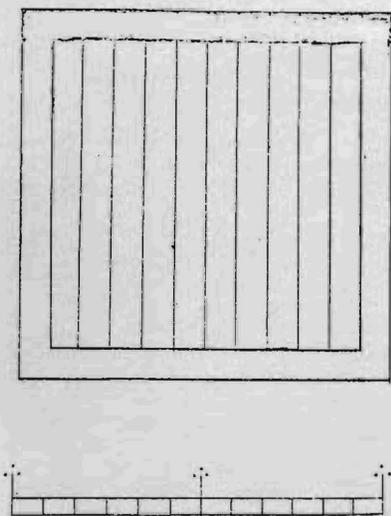
The 1822 jail has approximately the same dimensions as the original brick buildings, but because of the terrain, it was set at a lower grade.

Like the earlier building, it has a slate roof and parapet gable ends, but its walls are laid with coursed rubble

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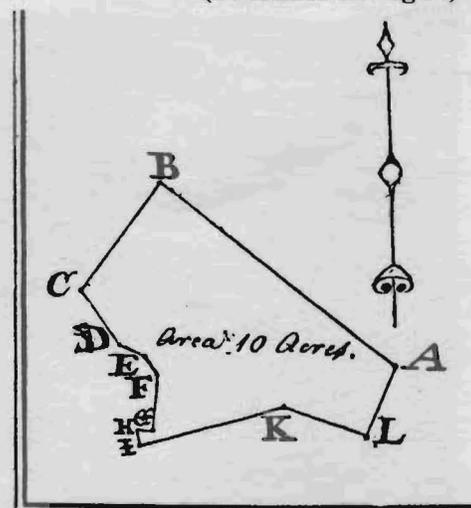


The plan of the first county jail, built in 1760 near what is today the newer section of the Warrenton Cemetery. It was a small, square wooden building. The first courthouse was located nearby.



A Scale of 6 feet to one Inch

-Courtesy John K. Gott



Inmates could leave the old "Debtor's Prison," as long as they stayed within a ten acre area in town, which probably ran from Calhoun St. (A), to Britton Hall (B), to Shadow Lawn (C), down to "a dead chestnut tree" (I), and back to Main St. (L).

Old Jail

(Continued from Page 3)

fieldstone and lined with heavy planks. (Today, only the west room on the first floor retains its original appearance.)

The second floor is reached by a metal staircase.

The east room on this floor contains a "modern" steel-and iron cellblock, of three maximum security cells, which was installed around the turn of the century.

A plot of land behind the new stone jail was purchased from Thaddeus Norris, builder and owner of the old Warren Green Hotel, in 1822, and a jail-yard wall 22 feet high and two feet thick was built around it.

According to local oral legend, this exercise yard became known as the "Hanging Yard," after a young lady of the neighborhood told of witnessing a hanging there.

Remarkably, this jail complex was to serve Fauquier County well for the next 140 years.

It remained basically unchanged through the Civil War, the Federal occupation of Warrenton, and Reconstruction.

On into the 20th Century, the Old Jail witnessed the destructive Fire of 1909, the Great Depression, and two World Wars.

Over this extended period of time, only maintenance and repair work were performed, preserving much of the original character of the ancient structures.

After several unsuccessful attempts, Fauquier County had built a jail that would last!

Old Jail in Jeopardy

The population of Fauquier County remained fairly stable until the 1950s.



Prisoners in the 1906 cellblock enjoyed few, if any, comforts.

But a changing populace and increasing demands by the state caused the jail facility to become continuously overcrowded. It was simply obsolete.

In a report to the county supervisors by then-Sheriff Sam Hall, the Old Jail was designed to accommodate only 13 or 14 prisoners at a time, but as many as 40 persons had been locked up there at one time.

During 1962, there was an average of 6473 prisoner days served in the jail, averaging out to 18 prisoners incarcerated per day, according to Sheriff Hall.⁹

Inspectors for the Virginia Division of Corrections repeatedly criticized the old facility in their reports, and Circuit Court Judge Rayner V. Snead had urged the county to build a more adequate facility for several years.¹⁰

Responding to this need, the supervisors began planning the construction of a new county jail.

After considering a site at the corner of old 8th and Lee streets (at the rear of the old Warren Green), the supervisors decided to locate the new jail further down the hill on Lee Street, on property purchased from the Warrenton Supply Co.

The original estimated costs were \$8000 for the land, and \$175,000 for the jail building. But once again, history repeated itself, with Fauquier's first new jail coming well over budget (final cost: more than \$365,000), and with numerous construction problems.¹¹

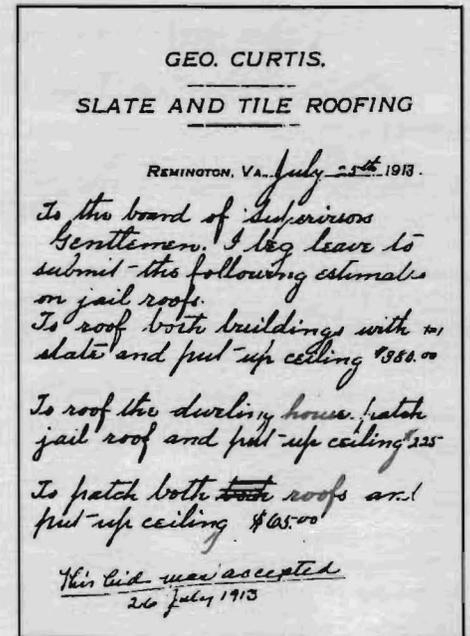
And then, there was the question of what to do with the Old Jail.

Initially, the county considered demolishing the old buildings in favor of a parking lot.

Preservationists Organize

Public outcry against demolition of the Old Jail was immediate and loud.

In an effort to save the historic buildings, a "Save the Jail" campaign,



—Courtesy John K. Gott

1913 invoice offers repair of both jail roofs for \$65, or replacement for total of \$605.

under the late Gen. John B. Rose, was organized in early 1964.

No fewer than 22 civic and historical organizations, as well as the National Trust for Historic Preservation and interested citizens from all parts of the county, rallied around the "Save the Jail" group.

The Board of Supervisors, impressed by the show of support for saving the jail, put off plans for demolition, and asked the group to organize a single, official body to work with the county.

It was critical that this body, however it was organized, be prepared to do whatever was necessary to preserve the Old Jail, and create and operate a museum there, *at no expense to the county.*

All interior preservation work, displays, and acquisitions would be the responsibility of the group, along with whatever fund raising, grant solicitation, or dues collection might be required to establish and maintain a museum in the Old Jail.

The county would continue to hold title to the property, and perform any necessary structural work and repair, as it would for any other county-owned building.

The group accepted these terms, and on November 18, 1964, received its Certificate of Incorporation as the Fauquier Historical Foundation, Inc. from the State Corporation Commission.

(For the record, the term "Society"

(Continued on Page 5)

(Continued from Page 4)

was later substituted for "Foundation.")

After about six months of painstaking groundwork, the permanent officers and directors were elected, an advisory council appointed, and dues set at \$5.00 per year.

Prisoners of Fauquier County spent their last night in the Old Jail on October 6, 1966.

They were transferred to the new facility at 50 Lee Street the next day.

In December, Jack McCarty, Chairman of the Fauquier County Board of Supervisors, officially presented the keys of the jail to foundation. After 158 years, the jail had left the care of the county, and became the responsibility of the Fauquier Historical Society.

Having succeeded in saving the building, the Society was now charged with creating a museum out of the ancient penal complex.

Stewardship of the Society

Upon receipt of the keys to the Old Jail, the first order of business was to conduct campaigns to raise funds, recruit new members, and secure contributions or loans of items of historical interest for display at the museum.

Looming in the background was the considerable task of cleaning and preparing the building for its opening to the public.

The first renovation work was started under the direction of the late William Parkinson, who was responsible for much of the cleaning of the walls and ceilings of the building complex.

It was Mr. Parkinson who discovered the original random-width pine flooring in the kitchen, under layers of linoleum and plywood.

Removal of plaster revealed the large wooden planks of the original walls; heavy beams in the ceiling, believed to have been salvaged from a ship, were also uncovered.

Mr. Parkinson also designed the shelves and cabinets of old pine, which cover up the electrical boxes, stove, sink, and ice box which were added to make the facility useful in the present day.

Also instrumental in the restoration of the interior of the jail was Mr. Gary Heath, a former Warrenton Police Chief, who served as president of the Society of the 1980s.

Accepting the project as his own, Mr. Heath scraped off many pounds of dirt, soot, grease, and paint in the kitchen, discovering that mortar in the walls was made of clay and sand.

The fireplace, with its crane and as-

sorted cooking tools, had been boarded over years ago.

It was reopened, and serves today as the centerpiece of the restored kitchen. Other kitchen furnishings and utensils came from several Fauquier homes.

The iron appointments were restored by the late Charles Harris, who also assisted Mr. Parkinson in much of his work at the Old Jail.

Artifacts and interesting items found during the renovation work have

been cleaned and cataloged.

In addition, an archaeological dig was undertaken in the old "Hanging Yard," which has yielded a collection of bottles, some of which came from the old Jeffries Drug Store on Main Street. These items are also displayed at the museum.

A critical but less obvious project undertaken by the Society was the restoration of the stone walls around the "Hanging Yard," begun in 1987.

(Continued on Page 6)



Restored kitchen in the jailor's quarters features period furniture, and the original fireplace cooking utensils found when the fireplace was reopened.



The Old Jail Museum has between 2500-3000 visitors each year during the current mid-April to mid-October season.

Old Jail

(Continued from Page 5)

At the time the Old Jail complex came under the care of the Society, the walls were covered with poison ivy, Boston ivy, Virginia creeper, and an assortment of odd flora.

Removal of these vines had to be done very carefully by hand. Many of the stones had fallen, and even more were loose; the wall was literally being held together by the vines.

This work was performed by the Cathedral Stone Co., Inc., of Washington, D. C., under contract with Fauquier County.

The contract included removal of the vines and plaster, re-setting stones, and repointing the walls with specially-mixed yellow sand mortar.

Swiss stone carvers, who labored on the National Cathedral for many years, performed this intricate work. During the restoration, weak areas in the walls were found and corrected, perhaps not a year too soon.

More recent work on the Old Jail buildings includes installation of new wiring, central heating and air conditioning, and the removal of some windows to return the 1808 building to its original appearance.

The interiors of the 1808 and 1822 buildings were recently repainted, and custom-designed showcases were installed in the reception area and War Room in 1994.

Over the years, the Old Jail Museum has received several recognitions, including certification as

a Virginia Historic Landmark in 1977, and inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

Under the stewardship of a caring volunteer organization, the Old Jail has been transformed into a museum of local history, repository of artifacts, and organized source of information about the long history of Fauquier County.

Although its original function cannot be overlooked, it is fitting that the Old Jail today is a place of enlightenment and historical appreciation.

Doubtless, the years ahead will bring many changes to Warrenton and Fauquier County. But we may trust that our heritage is safe, inside the thick walls of the Old Jail Museum.

—Isabelle Palmer
and John Toler

Footnotes

1. *Fauquier Court Minute Book, 1759-1763*, Page 21.

2. *Ibid.*, page 34.

3. *Notes on the Fauquier County Jail, 1759-1824*, by John K. Gott. Page 2.

4. *Ibid.*, page 3.

5. *Ibid.*, Interview with the late Charles E. Jeffries, page 4.

6. *Fauquier in the Revolution*, by Triplett Russell and John K. Gott, page 255.

7. *Fauquier Court Minute Book, 1759-1963*, page 284.

8. "Fauquier County Jail," a memorandum submitted by Carroll C. Curtice, Architect, in Sept., 1972, page 1.

9. *The Fauquier Democrat*, June 20, 1963, p. A-4.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, May 19, 1966. Page A-1 and Nov. 20, 1966, page 1.

Preserving History the Goal of Both Societies

(Continued from Page 1)

tion was not centrally organized and recorded.

Certainly, the writings of Capt. John Smith in 1617 and John Lederer in 1670 were well-known; likewise, the chapter about Fauquier written by Henry Howe in his *Historical Collections of Virginia*, published in 1843.

More local information in the form of deeds, wills, grants, census information, and marriage bonds back to the formation of Fauquier County were available at the courthouse.

But less obvious - and more likely to be lost - were the diaries and letters from the past kept in family archives.

One of the major contributions of the original society was the annual *Bulletin* of local history, which it published from 1921 through 1924.

These volumes contained historical research on the Northern Neck (of which Fauquier was once a part), histories of the parishes and towns, and profiles of the Marshalls and other noted men of early Fauquier.

Also found in the *Bulletin* were abstracts of wills, and the genealogies of prominent local families.

The Publishing Committee consisted of H. C. Groome (the builder of Airlie), E. S. Turner, G. L. Fletcher, and Curtis Chappellear. Alfred A. Horner served as Secretary.

During these and later years, the primary contributors to the *Bulletin* were Mr. Groome, Mr. Chappellear, and Fairfax Harrison.

Many of their writings were published privately, leaving a collection of works which have become invaluable to students and researchers.

A New Historical Society

The Fauquier Historical Society of today was organized in 1964, primarily to save the historic Old Jail from destruction, and to create within the jail a museum of local history.

The core membership of the new society was drawn from the "Save the Jail" committee.

It was led by Gen. J. B. Rose, who served as president during the organizational period; Mrs. H. P. Kelly, secretary; and George Coyle, treasurer.

The charter creating the new Fauquier Historical Society, incorporated in November, 1964, outlined the



Society President Jackie Lee conducts tour for middle school students.

(Continued on Page 7)

(Continued from Page 6)

organization's six major responsibilities:

1) To preserve and maintain the jail complex as a *museum*, without any expense to Fauquier County, with the exception of structural maintenance and outside repairs.

2) To collect and preserve any documents, manuscripts, furniture, or other items of historical significance to the county, state, or nation.

3) To acquire, purchase, lease, or manage for preservation historical homes, buildings, monuments and land connected with the history of Fauquier County.

4) To encourage and foster public interest and education in the history of the county, state, and nation.

5) To receive and administer funds and properties, of all kinds, for the above purposes.

Following the chartering of the Society, a permanent slate of officers and board of directors was elected.

Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, USMC (Ret.) was elected president; James C. Ambler, first vice president; John K. Gott, second vice president; Harry Pearson, recording secretary; John Chilton, corresponding secretary; and George Coyle, treasurer.

The first directors, in addition to the officers, were Sen. John H. Alexander, Dr. Evan Ashby, John B. Adams, Randolph Carter, Alan Day, Harry deButts, William D. Doeller, Tom Frost, Thomas Furness, Jason Paige, Hubert Phipps, Douglas Smith, C. Hunter Ritchie, Philip Sanders, Washington Reed, Willis Van Devanter, D. P. Wood, Harcourt Lees, and Mrs. Robert Neilson.

The Work Continues

The primary goal of the Fauquier Historical Society has been to operate and expand the Old Jail Museum.

From a practical standpoint, this means keeping the museum open on a day-to-day basis from mid-April to mid-October with the staff of about 40 volunteer docents.

These dedicated volunteers, all whom share an appreciation of our local history, receive comprehensive training on the buildings and artifacts connected with the Old Jail, before they greet visitors to the museum.

Generally, two or three docents are required on each three-hour shift, so that the reception area is manned at all times, and visitors may be escorted upstairs and to the cellblock areas.

Currently, a plan is under study to

expand the Museum's open season. The new plan will require paid docents and a budget for eleven- or twelve-month operation.

The Fauquier Historical Society Board of Directors is responsible for setting the direction of the museum, seeing that all necessary repairs and improvements are made, and that grant money is properly applied for and disbursed.

Other board members work with the schools on educational projects, go on field trips to other museums, and attend historical symposiums.

The board represents a wide spectrum of necessary talents, from finance specialists and contract administrators to builders and real estate professionals. And like the docent staff, the members of the board offer their time and energy at no charge to the Society.

Board members serve on committees and sub-committees, with assignments based on the individual member's interests and availability to serve.

In addition to the Old Jail Museum, members of the Society have worked on other projects related to local history.

In 1976, the Society published a reprint of the 1776 map of Fauquier County, as part of the American Revolution Bicentennial celebration.

The Old Jail: Place of Hauntings?

A jail is often a place of sadness and misery, and over the 150-plus years that the Old Jail served the Fauquier County as its main detention center, it was undoubtedly the scene of much human drama.

Although the last prisoner held in the Old Jail departed almost 30 years ago, there is reason to believe that some left their spirits behind, haunting the place to this day.

Do you believe in ghosts?

There has been talk of hauntings in the Old Jail for many years.

In Margarite DuPont Lee's *Virginia Ghosts* (Virginia Book Co., Berryville, VA, 1966), there is a story of one such paranormal experience that was repeated there several times.

Sometime during 1924 or 1925, an elderly gentleman, remembered today only as "Mr. G", was arrested after he attempted to burn his farm, and himself, because he believed that "distant relatives" were plotting to seize his property.

Charged with arson and attempted

A year later, the Society published Bulletin No. 5, *Gold Mines of Fauquier County*, researched and written by Bob A. Barron.

The Society's most popular publication, of which tens of thousands have been printed and distributed over the years, is the **Walking Tour of Warrenton**.

The tour covers the significant buildings and houses on Main, Culpeper, and Winchester streets. Printing of this informative brochure is subsidized by The Fauquier Bank.

News and Notes, the Society's newsletter, has been published since 1979. It is currently published twice a year, and is devoted to historical research, continuing the work of Groome, Chappelle, and Harrison.

It also regularly carries genealogical inquiries, letters from members, and discussions of old and new books pertaining to Fauquier County history.

Society members do all this because they believe that by sharing knowledge about our heritage, they are also preserving it.

Whether native-born or a relative newcomer to Fauquier, those who support the Fauquier Historical Society, through their membership or service, have made a commitment to the future, as well as the past.

suicide, Mr. G was brought to the Old Jail for confinement and observation.

However, the "shock and confinement of the affair was too much for one of his age and infirm condition," according to Mrs. Lee.

It was decided to move him to a nearby residence where he could be more comfortable and receive better care.

He died before he could be moved from the jail.

A woman arrested for a misdemeanor a few months later was placed in the cell which where Mr. G had died.

When brought to trial, Judge Edward S. Turner asked the woman if she had seen any visitors since she was arrested.

She replied, "No, sir! Not anyone I am acquainted with . . . but a little old man with a long white beard comes to my cell every night. He won't speak to me, and every time he's been there he's tried to take away the bed clothes!"

When asked to give a description of the intruder, the woman described Mr.

(Continued on Page 8)

Hauntings

(Continued from Page 7)

G in perfect detail. Mr. G's former attorney, the legendary Major Robert A. McIntyre, was in court that day. He heard the women's statement, and verified her description of the old gentleman.

Strange Footfalls

More recently, unexplainable phenomena have been noted by Fauquier Historical Society members and others who have spent time working in the Old Jail Museum.

Former Society President H. Gary Heath, who spent many hours working on the kitchen and other rooms in the museum, recalled an incident that occurred several times during the winter of 1982-83.

While hard at work scraping loose paint from the ceiling of the old kitchen, he distinctly heard someone walking on the floor above him, only inches away from his head.

Convinced that someone had slipped into the museum and gone upstairs unnoticed, he searched the entire upper level, but found nothing.

This strange interruption occurred at least four more times during the six months that he worked in the kitchen.

One time, when his wife, Sheila, was working in the War Room, she, too heard the strange footfalls upstairs.

Calling her husband, the couple stopped their work and went upstairs to investigate. Again, no one was found.

"I don't believe in ghosts," said Mr. Heath later. "Perhaps it was a unique echo from the street, or the creaking of the old building . . . but whatever it was, it got a reaction out of me!"

That was not his only experience at the Old Jail that he could not explain.

Working upstairs this time, Mr. Heath had just painted the new bookshelves in the library, and the small step leading to the computer room.

Before leaving the room, he checked his work, and noticed a small footprint had appeared in the fresh paint on the step.

"I don't know where it came from," he said. "But I know it wasn't from my work boots!"

The Mysterious Woman

Perhaps one of the most vivid sightings is also the most recent.

Robert W. McMeans, the contractor who did extensive restoration and

paint work in the museum, was apparently visited the ghost of a yet-unidentified woman.

Mr. McMeans was so impressed by his experience that he prepared a report to the Society describing his encounter, which occurred while he was working at the 1822 cellblock on the morning of February 15, 1994.

Due to the icy weather, Mr. McMeans' son had not been able to join him at work that day.

He had just moved his materials and supplies up the steep steel stairs, and was scraping paint from the walls and ceiling of the upper hallways.

"I was half-sitting, half-standing on the stairs, scraping the wall, when I became aware that I was not alone," reported Mr. McMeans. "I saw a shape appear on my right, at the top of the stairway, only three feet away from me."

"To say the least, I was startled. There was no one else in the entire building, and no way for anyone to have come up the stairs without my knowing it," he said.

"I quickly moved down the few steps toward the doorway, all the time watching this image of a woman at the top of the stairs."

"My first reaction was to run, but yet, I wanted to stay. She remained at the top of the stairs for several seconds, before fading away before my bewildered eyes," said Mr. McMeans.

Although he only saw her for a few seconds, Mr. McMeans remembered her appearance in surprising detail.

"She was a small lady of slender build, but shapely by anyone's standards," he wrote.

"The image had very few facial features, but the impression that remains

is one of softness. Her arms were behind her, or beneath some sort of loose white shawl, which was draped over one shoulder and pulled tightly around her waist.

Her dress came all the way to the floor, and concealed her feet. She had the most yellow hair I have ever seen; it was pulled to the right side, and bound with a white ribbon," said Mr. McMeans.

"Her dress was lovely, with lacy, layered edges covering her ample bosom," he continued.

"Six white, pearl-like buttons went down each side from shoulders, contrasting with the color of the fabric, which softened from the medium blue at the top to a softer blue-white at the waist.

"Below her waist, the flowing white fabric of the dress and the woven shawl came together as one, and sparkled like softly falling snowflakes sparkle before the headlights of a car," he recalled.

"She spoke not a word, nor made any movement after she appeared. To say she had an effect on me would be putting it mildly!" said Mr. McMeans.

"I am convinced that I have met a ghost! I have thought long and hard about why she appeared to me, and why this happened, but to no avail," he said.

"Maybe she just wanted to watch me working... I guess we will never know."

"If you see her, will you give her a hug for me?" he concluded. "She looked like someone who needed a hug."

Now do you believe in ghosts?

-John Toler

Old Jail Museum
OPENS
April 29, 1995

The Fauquier Historical Society

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