

Augusta Annals

A newsletter published three times a year by the Augusta County Historical Society

SAVE THE DATE:
AUGUST 25, 5-9 P.M.

SOCIETY CELEBRATING 60 YEARS WITH DIAMOND JUBILEE

Sixty years ago a group of visionary men and women met to discuss their interest “in preserving papers and artifacts of historical importance” relating to our area’s history and to explore the idea of organizing a historical society. A committee headed by Drs. Howard McKnight Wilson and Richard Phillips Bell, III, was formed to submit a slate of officers for such an organization and to draft a constitution and by-laws. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Fast forward six decades and there is much to celebrate. The society co-owns a restored railroad hotel with a history gallery, oversees tens of thousands of documents, photographs, and artifacts in a climate controlled space, has published 60 years’ worth of journals, has launched the Augusta Community Portal so that our digitized history is available around the world, and hosts myriad events and activities not even dreamed about in 1964.

More than ever the Society is dedicated to preserving our local history for generations to come. To guide us in those efforts we now have a strategic plan created after a year of intense, comprehensive work. To fulfill our goals of increasing accessibility and visibility for all of our communities’ stories, widening our public engagement with innovative programs, and advocating for historic sites, we must strengthen our operational capacity by hiring professional staff, engaging

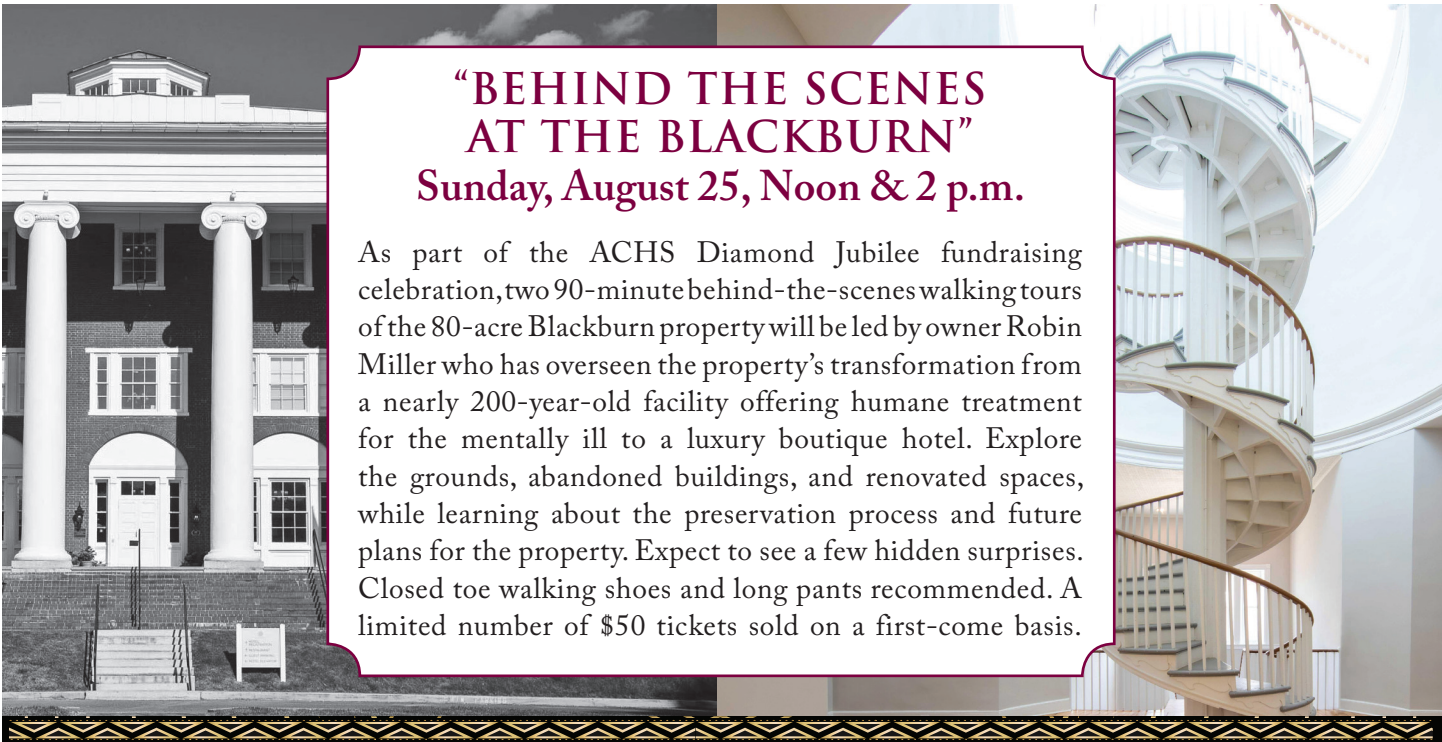
more volunteers, and expanding internships.

That’s why we are throwing a rip-roaring birthday party – a Diamond Jubilee – with the idea of raising at least \$60,000 so that we can keep “Preserving the Past for the Future.” The big bash will be held on Sunday, August 25 from 5-9 p.m. The place is the Historic Blackburn Inn and Conference Center in The Great Hall event building. This will be a happening evening with both live and silent auctions (think trips, art, and adventure), surprise entertainment showcasing upcoming ACHS events, heavy hors d’oeuvres, a limited open bar, a photobooth and much, much more.

You can be a part of this historic celebration in a variety of ways, all featured in this newsletter. First, you can buy tickets to the Jubilee and join the fun. Second, you can be a sponsor and really partner full force in preserving our area’s history. Third, you can donate something to our auctions – do you have a yacht that you can give up for a week or a beach house somewhere, or a piece of art or antique that you would donate to a good cause? Fill out the attached forms or contact us using the information on those forms.

We can’t wait to see you at our birthday party. Have a great summer.

—ACHS Board



**“BEHIND THE SCENES
AT THE BLACKBURN”**
Sunday, August 25, Noon & 2 p.m.

As part of the ACHS Diamond Jubilee fundraising celebration, two 90-minute behind-the-scenes walking tours of the 80-acre Blackburn property will be led by owner Robin Miller who has overseen the property’s transformation from a nearly 200-year-old facility offering humane treatment for the mentally ill to a luxury boutique hotel. Explore the grounds, abandoned buildings, and renovated spaces, while learning about the preservation process and future plans for the property. Expect to see a few hidden surprises. Closed toe walking shoes and long pants recommended. A limited number of \$50 tickets sold on a first-come basis.

SPONSORSHIP LEVELS:

Diamond \$6,000 Sponsor

includes 8 Diamond Jubilee tickets | 2 tickets to afternoon behind-the-scenes tours of Western State buildings with Robin Miller | an advertising table | a banner recognition on poster and in program

Sapphire \$3,000 Sponsor

includes 4 Diamond Jubilee tickets | a banner recognition on poster and in program

Ruby \$1,500 Sponsor

includes a banner | recognition on poster and in program

Emerald \$750 Sponsor

includes recognition on poster and in program

Opal \$500 Sponsor

includes recognition on poster and in program

Would you like to donate something to the live auction (a getaway vacation, some adventure or experience; an antique or piece of art) or to the silent auction?

Item _____

Estimated Value _____

TICKETS:

Diamond Jubilee Event Tickets \$100 each

- I would like to purchase _____ Diamond Jubilee Event tickets at \$100 each
- I would like to purchase _____ “Behind the Scenes” tickets at \$50 each. Indicate your first and second choice of tour time _____ 12 p.m. _____ 2 p.m.
- I would like to make a donation of \$ _____

Total Diamond Jubilee Event tickets: _____
 + total “Behind the Scenes at the Blackburn” tickets: _____ =
 total amount: \$ _____

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

PAYMENT INFORMATION:

I wish to pay by:

- check (payable to ACHS) VISA MasterCard

Card# _____

Exp. date _____ 3-digit verification # _____

Name on card _____

Signature _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

- I would like my tickets mailed to the above address
- I would like to pick up my tickets at the ACHS offices
Limited office hours, call or email in advance for ticket transaction

Please fill out this form and mail with payment to:
 Augusta County Historical Society
 P.O. Box 686, Staunton, VA 24402
 Our office is located at the R.R. Smith Center for History and Art
 20 S. New Street, Staunton, VA 24401.
 email: Augustachs@ntelos.net
 website: www.augustacountyhs.org

PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

Dear History Lovers,

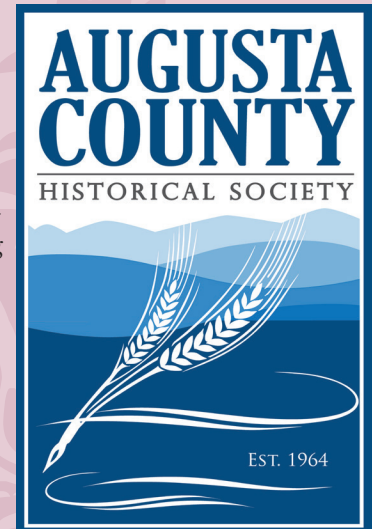
Happy 60th Anniversary! And, like a fine wine, the Augusta County Historical Society only gets better with age. As a matter of fact, have you ever been so busy that, as the old saying goes, “you meet yourself coming?” That’s kind of the way we feel here at your Augusta County Historical Society. You would think that after two (yes, two) highly successful spring programs, the excellent presentation by Glenn Hanger on the Dutch Hollow Cemetery at our Spring Meeting and General Ted Shuey’s remembrance of the 80th anniversary of D-Day, we would stop and catch our breath. Well, there’s no time for that.

As you can see in this issue, we have a busy and important summer ahead of us, perhaps the most important summer in the history of the Society. In order to maintain this unprecedented pace, we are about to embark on a new era that will define our future for generations to come. As always, your partnership is crucial as we head into our Diamond Jubilee and beyond.

I am sad to note the departure of our long-time treasurer, Kathy Crow. Her excellent leadership has helped ACHS navigate many financial challenges during her long tenure. Grace Smith, who is responsible for our very popular McCleary Mondays on social media, will assume her duties as treasurer. Also, Andrew Phillips has been voted in by our membership to assume the role of president-elect. Finally, office manager Mary Gooden and volunteer Betty Lewandowski have announced that they will retire later this year. To fill those very big shoes, we are happy to announce that we have hired Maitlyn Ritter as our new Administrative Assistant. We will introduce Maitlyn more formally later.

So, on behalf of the board, staff, and volunteers of the Augusta County Historical Society, **Happy 60th Anniversary!**

*Yours in History,
Ray Wright, ACHS President*



ACHS UPCOMING CALENDAR

- Sunday, Aug. 25, 2024** 5-9 p.m. Augusta County Historical Society Diamond Jubilee. This 60th Anniversary Fundraiser takes place at the Blackburn Inn & Conference Center’s Great Hall, Staunton. Tickets are \$100. Enjoy hors d’oeuvres, limited open bar, silent and live auction, photobooth and special entertainment. **Note:** Behind the Scenes tours of the 80-acre property will be at noon and 2 p.m. Tours are \$50/person. Ticket and sponsor forms on page 2.
- Through Aug. 18** “Waynesboro’s Ray Abraham Yoder: Art Educator with a Mission” continues at the Wayne Theatre in Waynesboro. Open Mon. 1-9 p.m.; Tues. and Thurs. 10 a.m.-2 p.m.; and one hour before and during all performances. Exhibit is free.
- Date: TBD** “Voices from the Blue Ridge Tunnel” explores the people who built the Blue Ridge Tunnel. History gallery, R.R. Smith Center for History and Art, 20 S. New Street, Staunton, Va.
- Nov.-Dec. 31, 2024** “Gifts of History” will be featured in the History Gallery. Ideal opportunity to shop for holiday and house décor, art, books, china, and more!

For more information, e-mail the ACHS office augustachs@ntelos.net or call 540-248-4151.



VOICES From the Blue Ridge Tunnel



The Project



The Engineer



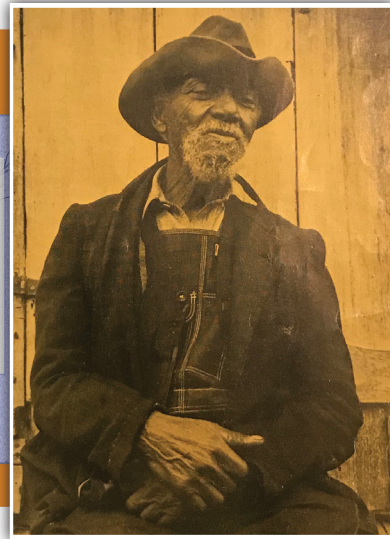
Irish Immigrants



Enslaved African Americans

Credits

Make a selection to continue...



New exhibit Features Those Who Built the Blue Ridge Tunnel

Sometime around the Fourth of July, the Society will be launching a fun, inspiring, and educational interactive exhibit “VOICES FROM THE TUNNEL: When Men were Machines” in its 1,200-square foot exhibit gallery and simultaneously on the ACHS website where it will live forever.

In early January of 1857, a short article in the Richmond newspaper exclaimed excitedly that “daylight now shines through the Blue Ridge.” After nearly six years of chipping away at the brutally hard rock, sometimes at the rate of just nine inches a day, crews from the east and west had finally met in the middle. It took another 16 months of clearing rock, applying brick, and laying tracks before, in 1858, the first train chugged through the nearly mile-long Blue Ridge Tunnel connecting Nelson and Augusta counties. The engineering genius behind the 4,273 foot long, 16 foot wide, 20 foot tall elliptical hole 500 feet below the crest of the mountain was French immigrant Claudius Crozet, whose name has often been informally tagged onto the railroad tunnel that, at the time, represented one of the greatest engineering feats in the world.

However, while it is true that Crozet designed and directed the tunnel project, he did NOT build it. The anonymous journalist who penned that short newspaper clip in January of 1857 correctly pointed to the true heroes of the tunnel when describing the breakthrough moment: “This event caused great joy on the part of the workmen, and every one of them immediately laid down their tools to spend the rest of the day in a frolic.”

In a time before mechanized drilling and blasting tools, before massive earthmoving machinery, before even the invention of dynamite, a workforce of enslaved African Americans and Irish immigrants fleeing famine applied their muscles to hand drills, picks, shovels, and hammers, packed gunpowder and lit fuses, and inch by inch opened up the mountain, laid tracks, and otherwise worked to bring America’s newest transportation sensation—the railroad—into the southern Shenandoah Valley. It was a time when thousands of men were, literally, nameless machines; cogs in the wheels of a railroad building enterprise.

Who were those men? “Voices from the Tunnel: When Men were Machines” is an interactive exhibit mounted by the

Augusta County Historical Society (ACHS) with the intention of pulling back the curtains of time and providing everyone the opportunity of “seeing” and “hearing” the stories of those whose blood, sweat, tears, and even lives were sacrificed for the rise of the Virginia Central Railroad (now CSX). At least 14 Irishmen and 3 slaves died in construction accidents and scores more succumbed to diseases such as cholera that swept through the shantytowns over the course of the tunnel’s construction. Others died later of lung ailments similar to black lung disease because of the working conditions in the tunnel.

Ireland’s Great Potato Famine (1845-1852) forced one million Irish to immigrate to America. Entire families came seeking a new life and work. About eight hundred of them ended up at the Blue Ridge Tunnel. Hundreds more worked on the other three nearby railroad tunnels and the embankments—with tracks laid on top—that connected them. The workers and their families lived in nearby shantytowns.

Local slaveholders supplemented the Irish workforce by renting out the labor of the African American enslaved persons whom they owned. More than 30 of those black laborers worked within the tunnel as it was being dug. Another 300 enslaved men contributed their involuntary labor clearing land, serving as blacksmiths, making bricks, preparing track beds, and other work necessary to build a railroad from scratch.

Watch for more information about this groundbreaking exhibit. We can’t wait for you to see and hear the “Voices from the Tunnel.”

Nancy Sorrells, ACHS Past President

“Voices from the Tunnel” opens later this summer. Watch for details.

TOP LEFT: The front page of the interactive touchscreen program that will be part of the “Voices from the Tunnel” exhibit.
TOP MIDDLE: James Williams who was forced to work on the tunnel construction as an enslaved person.
TOP RIGHT: John Kelly, an Irish contractor who worked on the railroad tunnels.



Yoder Exhibit Continues at the Wayne Theatre

For those of you who meant to stop by the ACHS History Gallery to see the Ray Yoder history and art exhibit or for those who want to see it again, you will be excited to know that a scaled down version of “Waynesboro’s Ray Abraham Yoder: Art Educator with a Mission” will be at the Wayne Theatre Exhibit Gallery throughout the summer. The exhibit contains all of the interpretive panels from the original History Gallery exhibit at the Smith Center along with approximately 15 Yoder watercolor paintings and prints, many featuring Waynesboro scenes.

Ray Abraham Yoder taught art and oversaw the art curriculum in the Waynesboro schools for 30 years, (1945-1975). He made art education his life-long mission. Even after retirement, his passion for bringing art to people of all ages continued for the rest of his life through painting workshops and his famous “painting vacations” where he took students into the woods and fields and showed them how to capture on canvas what they saw around them.

The exhibit runs until August 18 and is free. The gallery is open Mondays 1-9 p.m.; Tuesdays and Thursdays 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.; and 1 hour before and during all performances (access limited to exhibit gallery for non-ticket holders). Other days and times are available by appointment. Call 540-943-9999 to schedule.

The Wayne Theatre, which is fast approaching its centennial in the city as a performance space and its 10-year anniversary of reopening after restoration, has provided a wonderful partnership with the Augusta County Historical Society for events and for showcasing many of our exhibits.

Nancy Sorrells, ACHS Past President

ABOVE: The Wayne Theatre exhibit gallery during the opening night reception for the Yoder exhibit that moved from the ACHS History Gallery in Staunton to the theatre’s exhibit gallery for the summer. (Nancy Sorrells photos)

Six for Sixty: Notable Benchmarks in ACHS History

As the Augusta County Historical Society celebrates its 60th year, it is appropriate to look back at some of the most important and pivotal events that have shaped the Society's growth and success as an organization over the decades. While many memorable occasions may come to mind, let's take a look at six that have made a lasting impact and still resonate today and into the future.

1. Sixty years ago, a group of visionary men and women met to discuss their interest "in preserving papers and artifacts of historical importance" relating to our region's history and to explore the idea of organizing a historical society. A committee headed by Drs. Howard McKnight Wilson and Richard Phillips Bell, III, was formed to submit a slate of officers for such an organization and to draft a constitution and by-laws. On May 7, 1964, a constitution and by-laws were adopted and a board and officers were elected. In November of that year, the first meeting was held and the first archival items were donated to the society's collection. The rest is history. *Excerpt from article by Nancy Sorrells in Winter 2014 issue of Augusta Annals.*

2. In June 2007, ACHS celebrated a huge step forward as the multi-year process to establish a solid footprint in downtown Staunton with the renovation of a former 1890s railroad hotel, and later furniture store, came to fruition with completion of the R.R. Smith Center for History and Art. The move into the Smith Center that summer provided archival storage, a research library, office space, and a gallery on the main floor to present changing exhibits. ACHS had a real home and a space to make accessible the rich history of Augusta County, Staunton, and Waynesboro to the public. Gone were the basements and storage facilities that had sheltered that history for decades. This \$5.3 million renovation enabled the society, Historic Staunton Foundation, and the Staunton Augusta Art Center to grow and thrive in a historic structure that has become a shining example of the best in local preservation.

3. Created as a National Historic District in 1998, Mount Sidney's establishment in 1826, made it among the oldest towns in Augusta County. ACHS sponsored and did the work of mapping, gathering oral histories, and preparing the documentation to place this community on the National Register of Historic Places. The community that makes up the Mount Sidney Historic District once consisted of a few residences, churches, and commercial businesses, most of which served the needs of travelers along the Old Wagon Road, later the Valley Turnpike, and today Route 11. The little town thrived in the 1830s and following the Civil War, the Valley Railroad arrived, giving locals more access to wider markets. This led to its reputation as one of the leading centers in northern Augusta County. Mount Sidney remains as one of the best examples of a preserved turnpike town in the Shenandoah Valley, offering excellent examples of vernacular architecture dating from the early 19th century to the mid-20th century.





4. Spanning six decades, the *Augusta Historical Bulletin* has been one of the most, if not the most, valuable resource for the documentation of events, people, and places that make up Augusta County's history from 1738 to the present. This outstanding academic journal has produced 94 issues (two issues a year from 1965-1999), and one every year from 2000 to the present. The *Bulletin* offers not only articles on area history, but reviews of recent books about national, Virginia, and regional history.

5. One of the most invaluable means of preserving our history is to make it accessible to the public - everywhere. Too often the stories that bring our rich history to life have remained hidden and unexplored except by the most diligent researchers. History comes to life every day, but only if you know where to access it. A milestone for the society has been the recent partnership with James Madison University's Histories along the Blue Ridge, along with several other institutions, to make the area's past accessible through cutting edge technologies that enable us to make rare documents available digitally. In 2022, grants from the Virginia Humanities and the Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge, ACHS purchased a large flatbed scanner and an overhead scanner so that bound items such as ledgers and diaries could be scanned without breaking their spines. The result is the Augusta Community Portal, a technology that makes it possible to unlock, preserve, and make accessible our area's amazing history through virtual platforms.

6. In 2013, ACHS acquired a rare 1797 surveyor's compass made by surveyor (and dentist) Charles Hogshead of Augusta County. Hogshead worked for the Augusta government as a surveyor from 1795-1801. As a skilled craftsman, Hogshead made his own surveying equipment and dental tools, while also serving as a deputy sheriff and assistant county surveyor. Although ACHS has a wealth of two and three-dimensional objects, the surveyor's compass is among the most important. It was instrumental in mapping out Augusta County and paved the way for generations to explore and settle the region that once reached almost to the Mississippi River.

Completion of a long-term strategic plan in 2022-2024, is charting the course of our future so that we can "strengthen our operational capacity, increase accessibility and visibility, broaden engagement through programming that appeals to all segments of our community, and to advocate and document the need to protect historic sites in Augusta County." The vision is for an enduring future that enables us "to be an inclusive resource for all, near and far, to gain greater knowledge and appreciation for the diverse people of Augusta County and their rich stories to help create a brighter future by understanding the past." *Mission statement from 2024 Strategic Plan.*

Here's to ACHS's Diamond Jubilee Year. Happy Anniversary!

*Lucinda Cooke, Augusta Annals Editor
Nancy Sorrells, ACHS Past President*

LEFT: Renovation and restoration of the Smith Center proved to be a challenging project. The former railroad hotel had been turned into a furniture store and then left vacant for many years. Initial work removed the bird filth and the green paint that covered the exterior, exposing the original red brick. Restoring the roofline and re-building the tower were significant to returning the structure to its original 1890s appearance. Completion of the R.R. Smith Center took almost a decade and cost over \$5 million.

ABOVE LEFT: The northern Augusta County turnpike town of Mount Sidney is seen here from the school. The view looking east affords a rare view of the main street backyards of those buildings sitting on the west side of what was once the Great Wagon Road, then the Valley Pike, and, finally, Route 11. Platted in 1826, the main street consisted of 41 long, narrow lots.

ABOVE CENTER: Augusta Community Portal logo.

ABOVE RIGHT: ACHS President Ray Wright holds the 1797 surveyor's compass made by Charles Hogshead.

Donate to "Gifts of History"

The holidays may seem like a long way off, but it's not too early to think ahead. Did you recently complete your spring cleaning? Are you looking for a place to donate those gently used items you just don't need anymore? Think! One person's giveaways might be another person's treasures. The Augusta County Historical Society will be happy to relocate those treasures to sell at our annual Gifts of History opening in November of 2024. Funds raised by the selling of used books, art, works of pottery, holiday décor, home décor, dishes, and more, assist the Society in carrying out our work of, "preserving the past for the future." ACHS will even come to your door to pick up items and store them until the holiday sale.

Didn't do any spring cleaning this year? Then, the lazy days of summer are perfect to take a long, hard look around for those potential Gifts of History treasures. We will find a new home for them and you have the satisfaction of clearing out that extra "stuff." Gifts of History has been a big fundraising success for the Society in recent years. Help us do it again in 2024.



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Lucinda Cooke, newsletter editor
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Mary Gooden, office manager

The ACHS Individual dues are \$45,
Family dues are \$65, Student dues are \$20,
Institutional are \$100.

Members receive invitations to the semi-
annual meetings, an annual banquet, the
Stuart Speaker Series, notices about other
special Society events and activities, and
discounts on Society books, and some
programs and tours. The dues include your
exclusive Digital Copy of the *Bulletin*.
Print copies are \$15 extra per year.

To become a member, send your check to:
Augusta County Historical Society, Attn.:
Membership, P.O. Box 686, Staunton, VA
24402-0686, or join on-line at
www.augustacountyhs.org.

Membership dues are payable in full
upon joining. You will receive any current
newsletters and *Augusta Historical Bulletin*
published during your year of membership.
Subsequent dues will be billed annually on
the anniversary date you joined.

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