

The CHRONICLE

Friends Commemorate 1619 Arrival of First Africans in Virginia and Salute the Restoration of Loudoun's Historic Selma



Alicia Cohen at Fort Monroe commemoration

OLD POINT COMFORT, Va.—On the last weekend of August here at historic Fort Monroe National Monument near Hampton, Virginia, visitors from around the world gathered to commemorate the “African Landing”—when a ship arrived 400 years ago from Angola carrying the men, women, and children who would become the first enslaved people in English North America

Among the event participants was Friends representative and Black History Committee member Alicia Cohen, shown at left reading the marker that tells the story of that landing:

The first documented Africans in Virginia arrived here in Aug. 1619 on the White Lion, an English privateer based in the Netherlands. Colonial officials traded food for these "20 and odd" Africans, who had been captured from a Portuguese slave ship. Among present-day Hampton's earliest African residents were Antony and Isabella. (continued on page 3)



Sharon Virts and Scott Miler Welcome the Friends to Their Restored Selma Mansion

For details on this special event, see page 6. (Selma photo by Tony Powell for *Washington Life*.)

Black History Committee Hosts Tour of Exhibit on Slavery at Mount Vernon

For tour information, please turn to page 3.



Painting by Junius Brutus Stearns, 19th Century.

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**Black History Committee Hosts Tour of Mount
Vernon and Exhibit 'Lives Bound Together'**



Join Black History Committee member and trip guide Steve Hammond on Saturday, September 14, for a day at Mount Vernon. In this personally guided museum tour, we will focus on the plantation as it was in the 18th century—the vibrant home of George Washington's family and their 317 enslaved people. We will arrive by 9 AM and depart about 5 PM.

Highlights of the day-long private event include:

- Wreath laying at the Slave Memorial
- Mansion tour
- Tour of the exhibit "Lives Bound Together," which looks at the enslaved community at Mount Vernon
- Visit with Washington family house servant Caroline Branham, brought to life by a character interpreter

Register Today: Send your name, email address, cell number, and any questions as soon as possible to trip coordinator Alicia Cohen at aaheritagelocova@gmail.com. We have spaces for only 20 visitors. Transportation between Leesburg and Mount Vernon will be via carpool. Parking at Mount Vernon is free. Pay admission fee at entry: seniors over 62 – \$17, adults – \$18. Bring your lunch or purchase at the food court pavilion.

Renew Your Friends Membership Today

Deadline for renewal is the first week of December. To learn whether you owe dues for the annual renewal cycle, look at the back of this *Chronicle* and see if the number above your name is *Dec. 2020. If so, your dues have already been paid for the coming year. If the date is *Dec. 2019 or *Dec. 2018, you owe dues for 2020.

Dues: Student/Senior \$15, Family \$25, Patron \$50, Sustaining/Business \$100, Benefactor \$250, Legacy Society \$500+ Tax deductible contributions are welcome. Make your check payable to Friends of Thomas Balch Library, Inc. and send it to P.O. Box 2184, Leesburg, VA 20177. To pay by Visa or Master Card, see details at balchfriends.org/join-us and download the printable form.

Black History Committee Commemorates First Landing of Africans

Continued from page 1:

Their son, William, was the first child of African ancestry known to have been born in Virginia (ca. 1624). Many of the earliest Africans were held as slaves, but some individuals became free. A legal framework for hereditary, lifelong slavery in Virginia evolved during the 1600s. The United States abolished slavery in 1865.

Donna Bohanon, Black History Committee Chair, on the Historic Commemoration

This year marks the 400th commemoration of the landing of the first documented Africans in English North America, and members of the Friends' Black History Committee (BHC) have taken active roles in attending and supporting events in Loudoun County, Jamestown, and Fort Monroe in Hampton, Virginia.

July 6: We visited the traveling exhibit "1619: Arrival of First Africans," curated by the Hampton History Museum and hosted by the Loudoun Museum in July and August. We found it to be a good introduction to this little-known chapter in American history.

July 17: Many of us attended a lecture sponsored by the Loudoun Museum and the Loudoun County Public Library and featuring Ric Murphy, a historian who has conducted extensive research on the African arrival.

He has studied the genealogy of descendants of these first Africans and is a descendant himself. The lecture provided new perspectives on our nation's beginning. You can find it on the Loudoun Museum Facebook page.

BHC Member Alicia Cohen Attends National Event

August 23- 25 weekend marked the 400th Commemoration of the First African Landing at Old Point Comfort, Hampton, Virginia.

The Friends' Black History Committee was represented at this historic event by member Alicia Cohen. "I like to see and feel historical spaces," Alicia explained. "When you are there, you never forget your experiences."



Brenda Doretha Tucker, descendant of first recorded Africans in the English Colonies

Alicia's trip was also a pilgrimage of genealogical significance since her family can be traced as far back as the late 1700s in Virginia. Before the trip, she read the book, *The Birth of Black America: The First African Americans and the Pursuit of Freedom at Jamestown* by Tim Hashaw, a descendant of those first Africans. Besides attending the events at the Loudoun Museum, Alicia read everything she could online and attended a program held at the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). At that program,

Fort Monroe National Monument superintendent Terry E. Brown discussed conditions in Jamestown, the first Africans' arrival, and the Kecoughtan, indigenous people who had lived there.

Joined by her cousin Gail Brown, a resident of Hampton, Alicia packed her schedule with major events.

August 23 offered a luncheon with a panel discussion on African American political pioneers. Later that evening, she attended a panel of scholars and researchers that was sponsored by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH).

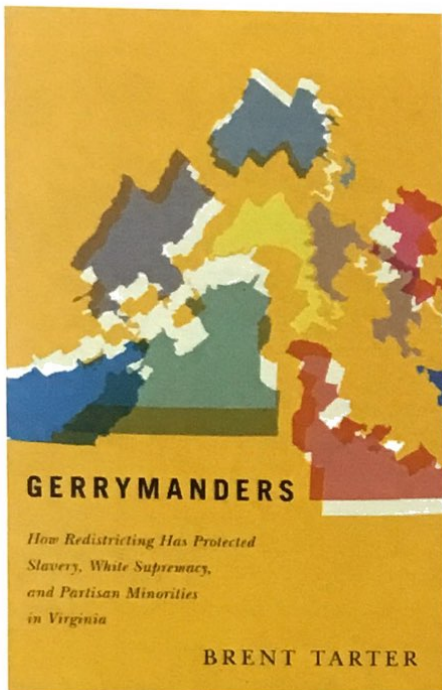
August 24 took Alicia to the site of the landing to see the historical marker and attend the ceremony dedicating the new Fort Monroe visitor and education center.

August 25, designated as Healing Day, brought the weekend to a moving close. Alicia said that what stirred her soul was the ringing of bells there and across the country—four minutes marking the 400 years since the first African landing. The bell-ringing honored not only those who arrived at Old Point Comfort late in August 1619 but also remembers those who lost their lives during the Middle Passage.

"Visit the new Fort Monroe Visitor and Education Center," Alicia advises. "And take your children and grandchildren."

For more information on 2019 events and conferences, check out americanevolution2019.com, project1619.org; nps.gov/fortmonroe; FortMonroe.org/calendar, and hamptonva2019.com.

Spotlight on Fall Speakers



Sunday, September 22, 2019 at 2 PM

Brent Tarter on *Gerrymanders: How Redistricting Has Protected Slavery, White Supremacy, and Partisan Minorities in Virginia*

Many people are aware that gerrymandering exists and suspect it plays a role in our elections, but its history goes far deeper and its impacts are far greater than most realize. In his Thomas Balch Library talk, Brent Tarter will focus on the subject of his new book: Virginia's long history of gerrymandering and its immense influence on the state's politics and how the practice impacts politics nationally.

Tarter exposes practices going back to 19th century and colonial times and explains how they protected land and slave owners' interests. The consequences of redistricting and reapportionment in modern Virginia become much clearer in light of this history. On the eve of the 2021 session of the General Assembly, which will redraw district lines for Virginia's Senate and House of Delegates, as well as for the U.S. House of Representatives, Tarter's book provides an eye-opening investigation of gerrymandering and its pervasive effect on our politics and government.

In addition to *Gerrymanders*, Brent Tarter has written *The Grandees of Government* and two forthcoming books—*How Redistricting has Protected Slavery, White Supremacy, and Political Minorities in Virginia* due out later in 2019 and *Virginians and Their Histories* due in 2020.

Sunday, September 29, 2019 at 2 PM

Ken Woodley on *The Road to Healing: A Civil Rights Reparations Story in Prince Edward County, Virginia*

In his book and lecture, author Ken Woodley tells the story of massive resistance in Prince Edward County and reparations won in its wake.

In 1959, in an act of massive resistance to the "Brown vs. Board of Education" Supreme Court decision, public schools in Prince Edward County closed rather than admit black students. While white students continued their education in private schools, black students were left without a formal education for five years until schools were forced to integrate.

A local newspaper, the family-owned *Farmville Herald*, led the 1959 fight to close the schools rather than integrate them. *The Road to Healing* is retired editor Ken Woodley's first-person account. The story centers on Woodley's efforts, finally realized in 2004, to establish reparations in the form of state-funded scholarships for African American students. Civil rights leader Julian Bond called this the first civil rights-era reparation in U.S. history. Filled with political twists and turns, the story follows Woodley's advocacy in the form of newspaper columns, written for the very paper that had advocated the closures, and in dialogue with elected officials, philanthropists, and power brokers at all levels.



Ken Woodley, above, was a journalist for 36 years at The Farmville Herald, the final 24 years as editor. In 2006, the Society of Professional Journalists, Virginia Pro Chapter, presented Woodley with its prestigious George Mason Award for lasting contributions to journalism.



Shannon Combs-Bennett

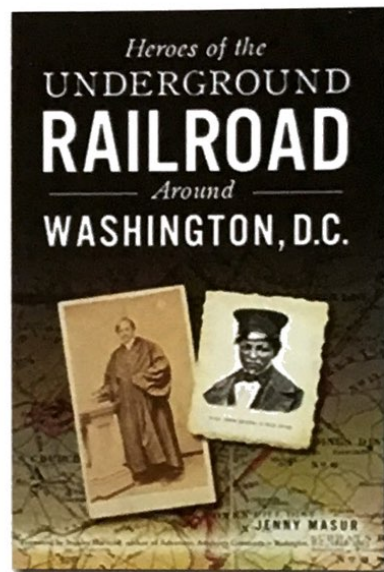


Brianne Kirkpatrick

Sunday, October 27, at 2 PM

Jenny Masur Discovers Heroes of the Underground Railroad

Anthropologist, author and proud Washingtonian Jenny Masur has been studying the Underground Railroad for 20 years. Her passion for the topic led to her new book, *Heroes of the Underground Railroad Around Washington, D.C.*



Through her research, Jenny Masur has discovered that many of the unsung heroes lived and worked in Washington, D.C. Masur found men and women, black and white, operatives and freedom seekers who demonstrated resourcefulness, courage, and initiative. Enslaved people engineered escapes, in groups and individually, with and without the assistance of an organized network. Some ended up back in slavery or in jail, but some escaped to freedom.

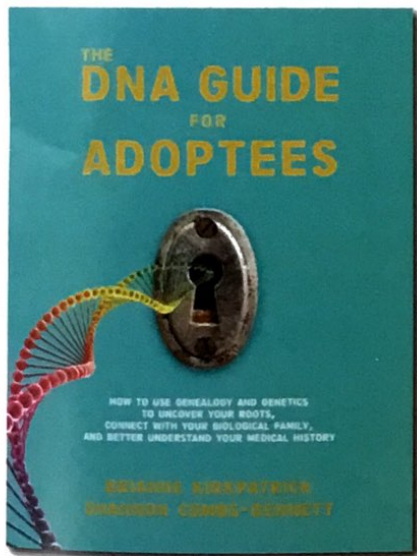
A graduate of Mount Holyoke College, Jenny Masur received her doctorate in anthropology at the University of Chicago. Her research was conducted in southern Spain on rural women's concepts of work and leisure. She also has interviewed Jewish women who immigrated to this country from Russia-Poland and turned these interviews into an oral history, *Jewish Grandmothers*.

Sunday, October 6, 2019 at 2 PM

The DNA Guide for Adoptees co-authors **Brianne Kirkpatrick** and **Sharon Combs-Bennett**, who has presented previous seminars at Thomas Balch Library, together explore how adoptees can use genealogy and genetics to uncover their roots, connect with their biological family, and better understand their medical history.

Both **Kirkpatrick** and **Combs-Bennett** have worked with family, friends, and clients using DNA testing in family searches. The melding of their minds

as a genetic counselor and a genealogist led to a book covering a wide range of DNA topics for the audience of people using DNA for family searches and medical reasons. And, if you are an adoptee, there is likely to be missing information about your past you hope to learn. *The DNA Guide for Adoptees* is a go-to resource for adoptees and also help others in search of their genetic origins.



Brianne Kirkpatrick, MS, LCGC, is a licensed and certified genetic counselor with a medical genetics background specializing in the area of ancestry testing. She is the founder of Watershed DNA and has worked with

clients who are impacted by adoption, donor conception, and NPE (not the parent expected) discoveries.

Shannon Combs-Bennett, QG, PLCGS, presenter, is an author and lecturer within the genealogical community. She writes and speaks nationally and internationally on a variety of traditional genealogy topics and genetic genealogy and is founder and owner of Trials and Tribulations (T2) Family History where she works with clients to solve their genealogical and genetic questions. Combs-Bennett earned her BS in biology and is currently earning her MSc in Genealogic, Heraldic, and Paleographic Studies. Shannon's book *Genealogy Basics in 30 Minutes* won the IBPA Benjamin Franklin Silver Award and the Mother's Choice Award for hobby books in 2017.

Sharon Virts and Scott Miller Welcome the Friends to Selma Mansion

Selma: From 18th Century Plantation to 21st Century Mansion Reborn



On Sunday afternoon, September 29, as guests of owners Sharon Virts and Scott Miller, Friends attending our annual event will celebrate the rebirth of Selma Mansion.

Selma's Remarkable History

In 1794, Ann Thomson Mason, the widow of George Mason IV, one of the nation's Founding Fathers, purchased 10,000 acres in the "wild lands" of Loudoun County for only a few shillings per acre. The property was inherited by her son Armistead Thomson Mason, who became a U.S. Senator from Virginia from 1816 through 1817. Between 1800 and 1810, Mason built the original Selma home at the base of Catoclin Mountain overlooking a sweeping vista of lawn and pasture.

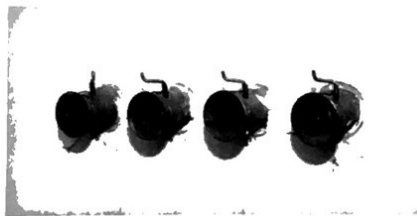
As recounted in papers at George Mason University, Armistead Mason, the senator, was killed in a duel over an election dispute in 1819. Selma was inherited by his only son, Stevens T. Mason (1819-1847). The estate's accounting work had fallen to Armistead, who kept the books from 1810 until his death in 1819. They included expenses and other transactions such as provisions and slaves hired, owned, bought and sold, and overseers' wages. Some of the descriptions of slavery on the plantation include

names and incidents such as an expense "for apprehending their negro man John Tebbs...Joe ran away in August...has never been heard of since..."

It was in 1896 that all but the original part of Selma was destroyed by fire. In 1896 the property was purchased by Elijah B. White, the son of Elijah V. White. He commissioned Richmond architecture firm Noland and Baskervill to design a Colonial Revival mansion, which was built between 1900 and 1902 and included part of the earlier house as a kitchen wing.



No expense was spared in achieving a level of luxury, including conveniences such as "speaking tubes", a form of intercom system, *shown below*.



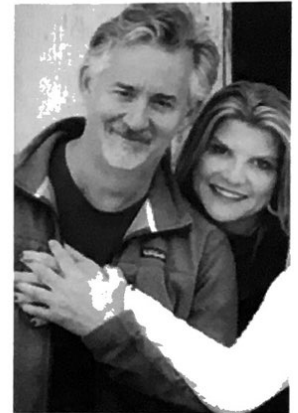
The plantation remained in the White family for several generations before being sold to the Epperson family in 1976; they turned the estate into a wedding venue. Following a succession of owners, Selma was sold to a foreign investor in 1999 and fell into neglect. A parcel of the original

212-acre Selma Plantation was sold to a local developer in 2002, leaving Selma with a 50-acre conservancy lot. In 2009, the nonprofit group Preservation Virginia placed the mansion on its "Most Endangered Historic Sites List."

As luck would have it, Sharon Virts, who grew up in nearby Lucketts, learned of Selma's plight. In March 2016, she and her husband, Scott Miller, took a big chance and bought the property.

The Virts-Miller Foundation

Scott and Sharon created the foundation to support what they call the pillars of a thriving community: education, culture, health, and opportunity development, particularly in economically depressed and rural communities.



Their restoration of Selma stands as a premier example of historic preservation. As Virts said in accepting a Community Blue Ribbon from the Loudoun Preservation Society and Joint Architectural Review Board, "Scott and I believe that sharing Selma Mansion's fulfilling and challenging rebirth is an opportunity to spotlight the county's historical significance and culture." **To see their documentation of the restoration project, visit selmamansionrebirth.com and [facebook.com/SelmaMansionRebirth2](https://www.facebook.com/SelmaMansionRebirth2)**

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Fall 2019 Programs & Exhibits

Programs and Events

Gerrymanders - Author Brent Tarter will examine how redistricting protected slavery, white supremacy, and partisan minorities in Virginia. 2 PM Sunday, September 22

The Road to Healing: A Civil Rights Reparations Story in Prince Edward County, Virginia - Author Ken Woodley will discuss efforts to redress the wounds of "massive resistance" and the county's closing of its public schools in 1959. 2 PM Sunday, September 29

The DNA Guide for Adoptees - Shannon Combs-Bennett will share ways to uncover your roots from her book, authored with Brianne Kirkpatrick. 2 PM Sunday, October 6, 2019

Heroes of the Underground Railroad - Anthropologist Jenny Masur recounts stories of the unsung heroes who resisted slavery around Washington, D.C. - 2 PM Sunday, October 27

Loudoun History Awards Presentation - 2 PM Sunday, November 3

Tours and Exhibits

Margaret Mercer Room Exhibits

Handmade Jewelry through September 30

Edwin Washington Project: Loudoun School Records - Larry Roeder - October 1 - 31

Illustrated Letters from the Rust Archives - November 1 - 30

Lower Level Meeting Room Exhibits

Loudoun in Transition by Jim Hanna - September to mid-October

Art Works by Friends of Leesburg Arts - Mid-October

Programs are held in the downstairs meeting rooms and are free unless otherwise noted. For news of workshops and tours, please visit the Friends' website at [balchfriends.org](http://www.balchfriends.org) or the Library's website at <http://www.leesburgva.gov/government/departments/thomas-balch-library/>