

# *The CHRONICLE*

## Friends Annual Meeting, Black History Committee Open House, and Loudoun History Series Kick Off the New Year's Programs

It's been an active autumn for the Friends of Thomas Balch Library and the Black History Committee. Expect the new year to be equally lively.

**Alicia Cohen of the Black History Committee (BHC)** represented the organization at the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Virginia. A few weeks later, BHC chair **Donna Bohanon** joined Cohen and other members for a special tour of Mount Vernon, George Washington's estate. And on September 29, the Friends were welcomed to the restored Selma Mansion for an exceptional annual event. *(Photos on pages 5.)*

**In the new year**, plan to join your fellow Friends at the annual meeting on **Sunday, January 12, 2020** at 2 p.m. in the downstairs meeting room. In case of inclement weather, the make-up date is Sunday, January 26. This year's program will be "Oral History: Loudoun's First Vineyard—An Interview with Lew Parker."

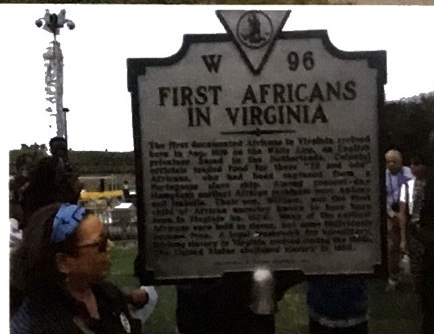
On **Saturday, February 1**, the Black History Committee will hold its third Open House at the library. The theme is Preservation of Historic African American Sites and Stories featuring the Friends of the Arcola Slave Quarters (FASQ). The BHC will share resources available at the library to conduct research. FASQ members will discuss their efforts to save the Settle-Dean Cabin and the Arcola Slave Quarters. *(Programs continued on page 4.)*



*Photo by Luke Greer*



*Top, Friends gathered at Selma Mansion for annual event hosted by Sharon Virts and Scott Miller. Above, Mount Vernon, undergoing restoration, was wrapped in scaffolding when Black History Committee members visited for a special tour. Right, foreground, BHC's Alicia Cohen attended the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Virginia.*



**Save Sunday, January 12, 2020 for Friends Annual Meeting**

**FRIENDS OF THOMAS BALCH  
LIBRARY, INC.**

P.O. Box 2184  
Leesburg, VA 20177  
www.balchfriends.org

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**Renew Your Friends Membership Today!**

If you missed the early December deadline for renewing your Friends of Thomas Balch Library dues, please take a few moments now to check the status of your membership. To learn whether you owe dues for this annual renewal cycle, look at the back of your fall Chronicle and see if the number above and to the far right of 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. If you're not already a member, please join us! Below is a form to fill in and send to us to renew or join.

**Friends of Thomas Balch Library Membership Form**

*Friends of Thomas Balch Library, Inc., is a 501(c)3 corporation.*

To become a member, please fill out this form completely and send it with your tax-deductible membership dues and/or contribution to: **Friends of Thomas Balch Library, P.O. Box 2184, Leesburg, VA 20177.**

If you have any questions, please call 540-579-2825 and leave a message, or send us a secure email using the Contact Us form on our website.

**Membership Dues**

- Legacy Society.....\$500+
- Benefactor ..... \$250
- Sustaining/Business ..... \$100
- Patron.....\$50
- Family..... \$25
- Student/Senior..... \$15

I would like to make a tax deductible contribution of\_\_\_\_\_.

**Please make checks payable to: Friends of Thomas Balch Library, Inc. To pay by credit card, fill out the information below:**

VISA or  MasterCard #\_\_\_\_\_

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**Thank you for supporting the work of the Friends of Thomas Balch Library!**

**Friends Annual Meeting Set for January 12, 2020**

The Friends Annual Meeting will be held Sunday, January 12, from 2 to 4 PM.in the downstairs meeting room of Thomas Balch Library. In case of inclement weather, the make-up date will be Sunday, January 26. The program will be "Oral History Series: Interview with Lew Parker." Parker is the founder of Willowcroft, Loudoun's first winery. This meeting also will include the election of the 2020 directors of the Friends of Thomas Balch Library Board.

# Black History Group Views Mount Vernon Through Lens of Slavery

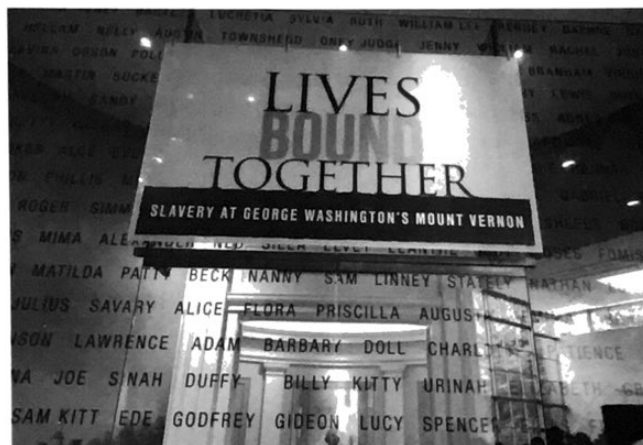
*By Donna Bohanon  
Chair, Black History  
Committee*

On Saturday, September 14, members of the Friends' Black History Committee (BHC) were welcomed to George Washington's Mount Vernon for an exclusive, all-day tour made possible by BHC member **Steve Hammond**. He has a direct connection to Mount Vernon as a descendant of the Syphax family whose ancestors were enslaved by the Custis family.

**Leading our tour was Brenda Parker** who interprets the estate from the perspective of enslaved housemaid and seamstress Caroline Branham. Through Parker's interpretation of Caroline Branham, we could appreciate Caroline's life as a mansion housemaid who labored long hours—unpaid—to ensure the comfort of the Washingtons and their many guests.

Meanwhile, Caroline, her life partner, and her children lived in compromised conditions with the ever-present fear of harm and family separation. Upon reflection, I am struck by the enormity of the grounds and the amount of work and level of expertise and professionalism expected of the enslaved to maintain both the grounds and mansion.

**Our tour of the exhibit "Lives Bound Together: Slavery at**



*Top, "Lives Bound Together" exhibition; center, replica of slave cabin on the estate's Pioneer Farm; above, burial ground marker for Mount Vernon's enslaved people.*

George Washington's Mount Vernon" was the other highlight of our day. A curator of the exhibition, **Jessie MacLeod**, shared her insights with us.

Although the exhibit has been extended, the book of the same name is available through Mount Vernon's website and other booksellers.

After the tour we were invited to provide suggestions to help Mount Vernon better interpret the stories depicted in the "Lives Bound Together" exhibit throughout the plantation's buildings and grounds. It is humbling to be able to participate in Mount Vernon's efforts to increase visitors' appreciation of the enslaved community's impact.

**Like Mount Vernon**, other historic plantations have expanded their interpretations

of slavery despite some visitor complaints about the new emphasis and role of interpreters. It is important for us to remember that these interpreters are not reenactors: their mission is to provide an educational experience about the people they interpret and to speak about the past in accessible, present-day language. Whenever we visit a historic site like Mount Vernon, we can support the interpreters' and staff's work by taking their special tours.

Finally, I am personally thankful for the opportunity to experience Mount Vernon—for the first time—through the eyes of Caroline Branham. And I'm grateful to Brenda Parker, Jessie MacLeod, and Steve Hammond for providing the Black History Committee with this opportunity.

## Black History Committee Explores Slavery at Mount Vernon



At Mount Vernon, Black History Committee members participated in a private tour focused on the lives of the plantation's enslaved people. Above right, from left, are BHC chair Donna Bohanon, member Steve Hammond, who arranged the tour, library staff member Tahari Johnson, and member Alicia Cohen. Above left, Brenda Parker interprets slavery at Mount Vernon by taking on the role of housemaid and seamstress Caroline Branham. (See BHC chair Donna Bohanon's story on page 3.)

## Friends Partner with NOVA Parks for "On-Site with Insight" Program

On Thursday evenings from March 5 through May 28, the Friends will join NOVA Parks in cosponsoring a 13-class program called "On-Site with Insight." Leading the classes will be Friends board member, educator, and public historian Richard T. Gillespie, right. The sessions will trace historical events chronologically with field trips to Loudoun-Fauquier communities and sites such as Lovettsville, Taylorstown, Leesburg, Neersville, Middleburg, Ball's Bluff, Atoka, Upperville, Lincoln, Purcellville, Aldie, and Hillsboro, as well as nearby Harpers Ferry, WV. Classes run from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. each week.

The fee for this series is \$225 per person with proceeds benefitting the education programs of Aldie Mill Historic Park, a property of NOVA Parks. Advance registration is required. You can pay online by credit card at [http://apm.activecommunities.com/novaparks/Activity\\_Search/3247](http://apm.activecommunities.com/novaparks/Activity_Search/3247).

Registration ends on Friday, February 27, but is filled on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, call NOVA Parks Aldie Mill Site Manager Tracy Gillespie at 703-327-9777 or email [tgillespie@nvrpa.org](mailto:tgillespie@nvrpa.org).



Rich Gillespie at the Atoka headquarters of Col. John S. Mosby.

## Selma Owners Welcome Friends for Annual Event and Preservation Program



*Selma Mansion, above: before restoration, midproject, and today.*



**On Sunday, September 29, Sharon Virts and Scott Miller**, co-owners of Selma, opened the handsome doors to their restored mansion for the Friends' annual event. Sharon Virts gave the keynote presentation—"Selma Reborn: Preserving Selma and Her Past."

Through slides, she detailed the massive and meticulous top-to-bottom undertaking.

She concluded her presentation with a reading from her upcoming novel, *Masque of Honor*, based on the true story of Armistead Mason of Selma and John Mason McCarty and their infamous duel in 1819.



**This year's event raised \$20,000.** The Friends of Thomas Balch Library give heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the event's generous hosts and to event sponsors: Gail Adams, Laura and Jeff Bolyard, Dr. Donald Cooper, Judy and Chris Gerow, Hunt County Sotheby's Realty, Judy Kozak and Ron Rust, Rosalie and Lewis Leigh Jr., Mary Grace and James Lucier, Teresa and Randy Minchew, Presidential Bank—Bruce Cleveland, Toth Financial Advisory Corporation, Susan and George Webber, Suzanne and Travis Worsham—Riverside on the Potomac. The Friends also thank the Black History Committee, Richard Gillespie, Sarah Huntington, Mosby Heritage Area Association, Shoes Cup and Cork, Tuscarora Mill Restaurant, and Kacey Young.



*Top, Selma co-owner Sharon Virts, her father, Leo Virts, left, and Friends president Don Cooper, PhD., read the chain of title prepared by the Friends. Above, Friends members gather for Virts' talk, and, left, enjoy refreshments. Right, Sharon Virts shares anecdotes about the Selma restoration, which began when she and her husband, Scott Miller, bought it in 2016. She closed by reading from *Masque of Honor*, her forthcoming Selma-based novel. Event photos by Luke Greer Photography.*



# Lee Lawrence, Carol Lee Honored with History Awards

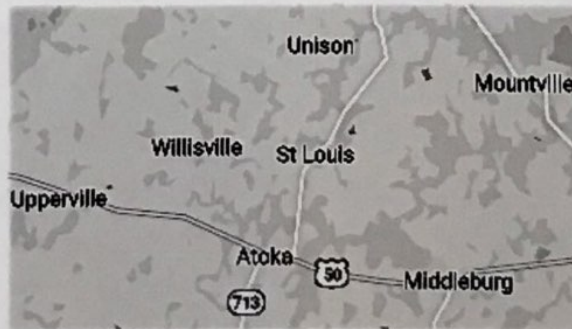
On Sunday, November 3, the Thomas Balch Library Advisory Commission honored Lee Lawrence and Carol Lee as recipients of the 27<sup>th</sup> annual Loudoun History Awards. Both were honored for their contributions to the preservation of Loudoun's past through collection of county memorabilia and documents, historic landmarks, visual arts, writing, and long-time commitment to local history organizations.

**Lee Lawrence** was recognized for her dedication to the restoration of a historic structure located on the Fauquier-Loudoun county line in Upperville, Virginia. The building was, most likely, living quarters for the enslaved or perhaps a free family's home. It was in dilapidated condition.

Lawrence began her work by researching its history, speaking with descendants, and engaging in the restoration of the small structure. Without her hard work and dedication, the building was headed for demolition.

In addition, Lawrence and her husband, Paul, have helped restore a former church in the village of Mountville.

After serving for three years on the board of the Mosby Heritage Area Association,



Lee Lawrence, top left, and Carol Lee. Center, Willisville's historic church. Above, locations of Willisville and Mountville..

she also was recognized for her legacy as editor and transcriber of two local women's diaries that have become invaluable to Loudoun's historical records. "Society of Rebels" and "Dark Days in Our Beloved Country" are first-person accounts of the hardest times in Loudoun's history. They now serve as vignettes for living history interpretations.

**Carol Lee** was recognized as the driving force behind the listing of the historic African American village of Willisville on the National Register of Historic Places. A small community of 15 houses and a church in southwest Loudoun County, Willisville dates to Reconstruction and is named for Heuson Willis, who owned a cabin on three acres that he bought for \$100.

With a vision of documenting the village, Lee worked with the Mosby Heritage Area Association to establish Willisville's provenance in order to secure listings on both the State Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

**In order to raise funds and awareness** to support the effort, Lee organized a gospel concert that brought in almost \$30,000 to help establish the Willisville Preservation Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization to oversee the Willisville cemeteries and promote the heritage of the village.

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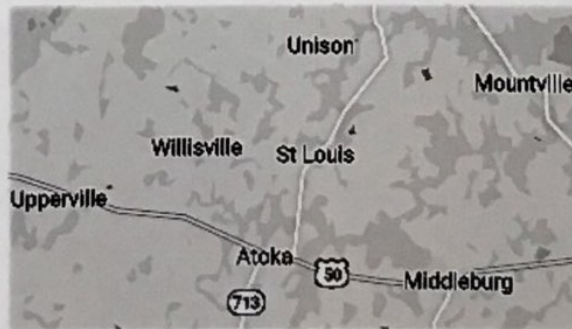
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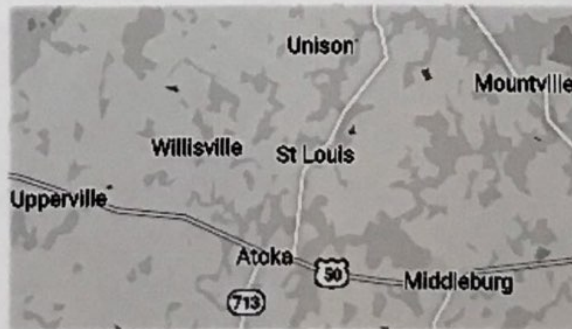
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