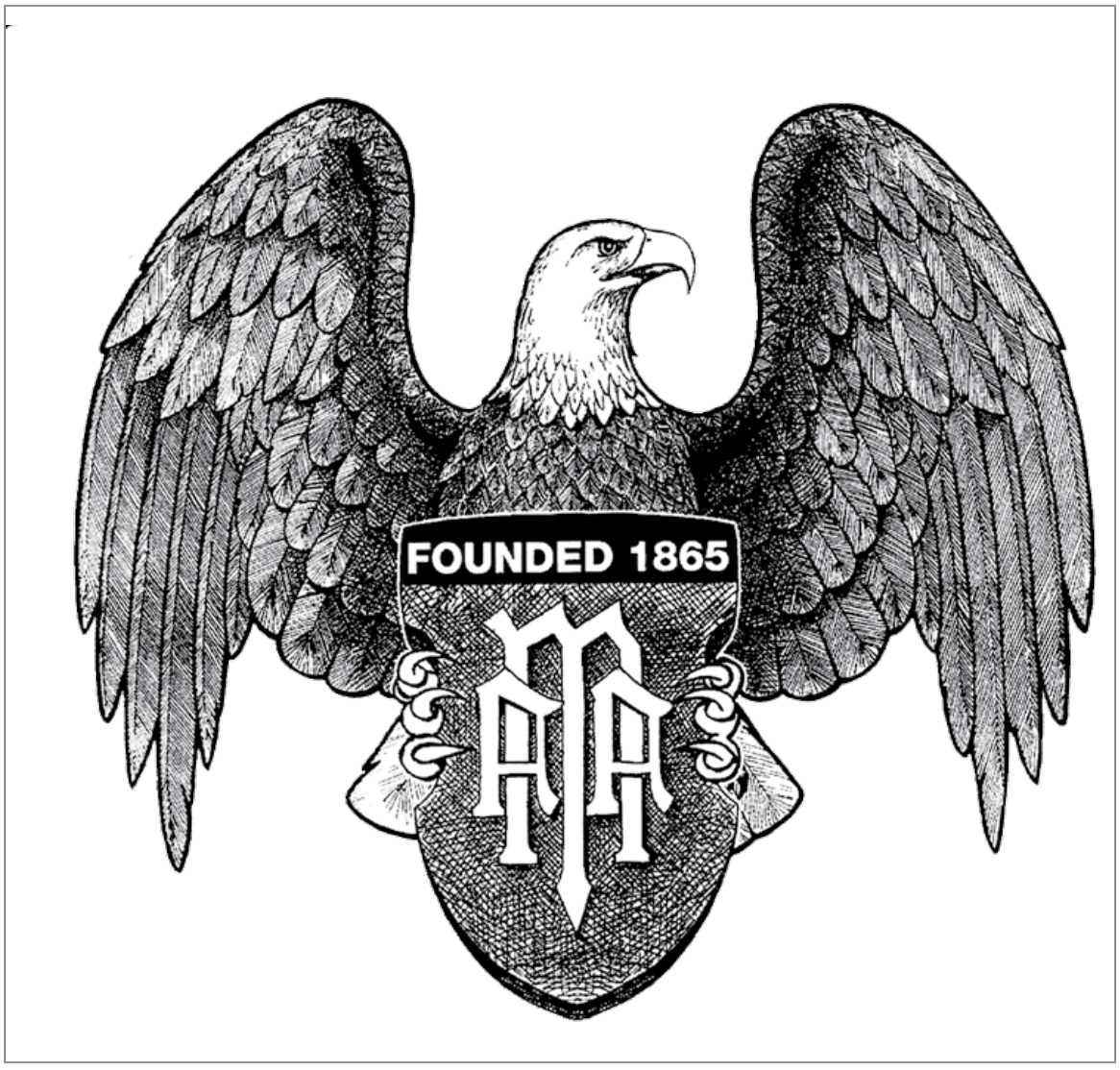
Museum of Augusta Military Academy News



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Ad Astra Per Aspera

MUSEUM OF AUGUSTA MILITARY ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

February - 2024

Chairman's Message

February 1, 2024

Dear Alumni and friends,

I hope that all of you who were affected by the recent Arctic freeze got through that uncomfortable and dangerous event safely and without personal or property damage.

I'm glad I missed the deep freeze, but I did get to enjoy some brisk January Virginia temperatures during my four-day visit to the Valley for our first Quarterly Board meeting in Staunton.

We had a very good turnout to the meeting with 13 directors present. My take away from that weekend was all very positive. The Board meeting lasted a tad under four hours and ninety percent of that time was spent focused on the business of the AMA Alumni Foundation and Museum.

Every member in attendance and on the Zoom video call were focused and very engaged in their particular committee responsibilities. More importantly, there was

a sense of camaraderie and teamwork amongst all members.

Everyone at that table brings something of value to our organization and I am extremely honored to be part of such a fine team!

I am pleased to report that the Museum operation is in very good shape. We were fortunate that when Amy left, and to her credit, the administrative side to our organization was buttoned up. This allowed for a very smooth transition for the new leadership to take over. Rich, Chris and our newest intern Keeley Potter, have been busy updating our museum exhibits and tweaking the traffic flow corridor through the building. I was very impressed with the clean, tidy and organized look of our current museum display areas. I invite you to visit so that you can see and appreciate what this dedicated and hardworking team is doing to make our museum an even better one every day.

We have five years of hard and tedious work in front of us to assure that our collection, history and legacy are permanently preserved and displayed for all to see, learn and remember. If what I have seen over the past three months is an indication of what the future holds for the AMA Alumni Museum and organization, we are most definitely headed in the right direction!

Sincerely,

Douglas W. Pennock
Chairman

AMA Alumni Foundation, Inc.

AMA ALUMNI FOUNDATION NEWS

Visit our new Webpage

The new **Augusta Military Museum Webpage** is up and running! Thank you to Bj. d'Orsay, Chairman of the Virtual Museum Committee and our Web designer, Kirk Fox of Valley Media for a phenomenal job!

We hope that you will be impressed with this new layout. Please remember that this is the maiden launch of what we hope will become a very dynamic, informative and interactive site for the world to see and enjoy.

Please leave your comments **HERE**, or in the **Contact Us** section of the site.

EXIT

AMA Alumni Board meeting attendees for the January 13th Meeting

Front Center
Gary Cripps '71

Second Row L-R
Doug Pennock '72, John Arthur '75, Jorge Rovirosa '70, Marc Aronson '68, Tom Del Valle '73

Back Row L-R
Garry Granger '71, Victor Gomez '69, Gordon Metz '68, Herb Maher '72-3, Brett Thompson '75, Lee Ramsey '73, Steve Trent '70

Missing from the photo is B.J. d'Orsay, '70 who attended via Zoom.

The AMA Alumni Board of Directors met at the Hotel 24 South in Staunton on January 13, 2024.

Quorum was established at 0905 hrs. Agenda items discussed were: Chairman's remarks and report, Museum Administrator report, Fundraising Committee report, Treasurers report, Reunion Committee report, PR Committee report, Election Committee report, Sports Hall of Fame Committee report, Virtual Museum Committee report. The meeting adjourned at 1300 hrs.

DUI Driver Trashes the Museum sign and the Front Gate

During the early morning hours of January 6, an intoxicated driver lost control of his vehicle and took out our Museum

Sign and damaged the front gate. The driver was critically injured.
The UPC has repaired the damage done to the concrete front gate, and the sign maker that originally built our sign is currently in the process of building a replacement.

Any donations to help underwrite the replacement cost of $4,400 will be appreciated.

January Museum Visitors

Scott Shea ’82 visited on January 24. Originally from Lansing, NY, Scott entered AMA at age 12, attending from 1979-82. In his second year, he was awarded Best In Band and was part of Col. Hoover’s 1981 champion fencing team.

Student portrait

Scott standing in front of Davis Hall 1979

Scott standing in front of Davis Hall 1999

Scott standing in front of Davis Hall 2024

2024 AMA Alumni Foundation, Inc. Annual Election Nomination Announcement

In 2022, changes to the AMA Foundation By-Laws were approved, thus solidifying the annual AMA Alumni Foundation Board member election procedures. As a result, on-line electronic voting procedures were permanently approved, with the “cycle” for annual elections occurring in the spring (i.e. April elections). Additionally, during the January 7, 2023 Foundation Board Meeting, the Board unanimously approved the addition of

four (4) board director positions, an increase from 13 to 17, which took effect for 2023 election cycle.

In accordance with the By-laws: Section 4.3. *Terms*: *Each Director shall be elected for a three-year term, starting with the date of the annual meeting at which they are elected, and until their successors have been duly elected and qualified, or until their death, resignation, or removal. The Board of Directors shall be divided into three classes with staggered terms, with each class as nearly equal in number as may be (i.e. five/six).* Accordingly, one-third of the Directors' terms of office shall expire/rotate each year. With the January 2023 board position increases, there are a total of **five positions / vacancies** up for consideration in the 2024 "cycle". The following five board members term expires this year. All five have expressed their desire to serve another term:

Marc Aronson '68 B.J. d'Orsay '70 Steve Trent '70 Gary Cripps '71 Doug Pennock '72

As specified in By-laws: Section 4.4 *Nomination of Directors* (Revised 08 January 2022), the call for nominations shall take place no less than sixty (60) days prior to the designated annual election start date. Notice shall be provided all members via AMA website posting, electronic mail and social media outlets. Nominations are welcome and encouraged for those wishing to become involved in the governance of the AMA Alumni Foundation. In addition to the four incumbents, any AMA Alumnus or qualified members may present a nomination for a qualified candidate, or may nominate him/herself, for the position of Director. The By-laws Article II: Membership, Section 2.1 & 2.2, delineates board member qualifications, which can be accessed / downloaded **here**. Nominations must be received no

later than thirty (30) days prior to the designated annual election start date, with no exceptions. Nomination "window" formally opens NLT **Thursday, February 01, 2024** and will close on **Sunday, March 31, 2024.**

Appropriately, the Election Committee is preparing an electronic ballot to enable on-line voting utilizing Google Forms. If you currently receive the AMA Email newsletter, a link will be sent to your email, where you will cast your ballot. ***If you DO NOT currently receive the AMA Email newsletter and wish to participate in this election, you must add your email to the monthly email distribution list by clicking here.*** Voting will open/commence no later than **Monday, April 01, 2024** and voting will end at **Noon (Eastern DST) Tuesday, April 30, 2024**. This election process will be publicized on the special newsletter, via email announcement, posted on the AMA website, and posted on the social media/Facebook sites.

NOMINATION AND VOTING TIMELINES

- **Thursday, February 01, 2024**: Nomination announcement made on email, website and social media. All those desiring to be nominated should contact John Arthur (**john.arthur@cdg-1.com**) / 757-650-6309 via email or telephone call. Please include Gordon Metz (**gordonrmetz@gmail.com**) on email.
- **Sunday, March 31, 2024:** The nomination deadline / window formally closed.
- **Monday, April 01, 2024:** Election electronic voting commences (30-day window).
- **Tuesday, April 30, 2024:** Electronic voting ends. Results provided to Chairman and Board members.

- **Saturday, May 04, 2024:** Special Zoom Board meeting with new members to conduct elections for Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.
- **Monday, May 06, 2023:** The election results and the newly-elected Board Officers (Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer) announced in the Museum Newsletter email and on social media.

AMA Reunion 2024

September 5-7

Headquarters Hotel

Hotel 24 South (Stonewall Jackson)

Call 866-880-0024 or 540-885-4848 to make your reservations now and be sure to tell them that you are with the AMA group so that you get the Reunion group

rate of $125.00 per night which includes covered parking.

40 years later. We won't forget

· Can you believe it's been forty years since AMA closed?
· This year's reunion we're focusing on fellowship with one another.
· Our hospitality Room will provide adult beverages Hors d'oeuvres & Appetizers on Thursday evening and all through the weekend.
· Our tour will be to Jeff Slaven's cattle ranch located in Weyers Cave. Last year he and his cowboys moved fifteen thousand, that's right, fifteen thousand head of cattle from his ranch into Canada without a single infraction. That's incredible! **PLUS!** At the end of this less than two-hour tour, our AMA visitors will be fed Angus beef for lunch all for thirty dollars.
· Also on Friday, we've scheduled a golf outing at Winter Green Resort Golf Course and the Sporting Clay competition at "Flying Rabbit Sporting Clays" in Harrisonburg.
· On Friday evening there will be cocktails followed by a banquet at the Hotel 24 South
· Saturday morning Breakfast will be served in the Banquet Room at Hotel 24 South and immediately following breakfast we will hold the Annual Members meeting.
· Understanding that the only reason we endured Founder's Day was because we missed a day of school. Well, if you haven't attended our reunions in a while, we have reduced this ceremony from an hour to fifteen minutes. That's right, fifteen minutes! Surely you can afford fifteen minutes of your time to honor the Roller's and our annual ceremony. Right? And you get to miss a day of school!

- Immediately following the Founder's Day ceremony, we'll move into our old AMA gym for a wonderful luncheon provided by Mission Barbeque. You won't want to miss this meal followed by the 2024 Sports Hall of Fame induction.
- On Saturday evening cocktails and Dinner will be served at Hotel 24 South.

Nominations are being sought for the Class of 2024 AMA Sports Hall of Fame (SHOF). You may nominate an individual athlete, coach, team or anyone that you feel contributed in a significant way to AMA sports. Personnel / Team(s) selected will be recognized during Annual Reunion in September 2024.

Please email your nomination to **John Arthur '75** email: john.arthur@cdg-1.com AND Rich VanBreeman, the Museum Curator, email: amacurator@gmail.com. John can be reached at 757-650-6309 for any questions.

All nominations must be received no later than FRIDAY, February 23, 2024.

AMA Legacy Scholarship Season

March 1, 2024 is the deadline to submit

The AMA Alumni Foundation will be offering three Scholarships in 2024!

There will be two $2,000 Legacy, one $1,000 scholarships offered to deserving candidates.

Two AMA Legacy Scholarship in memory of Jim Towe AMA '60 ($2,000 each), (restricted to AMA descendants), funded by Al Smith '66

The Louise McVey Leonard - Robert P. Leonard Memorial Scholarship ($1,000) is funded by Bill Mcvey '60 in honor of his Aunt and Uncle who paid the tuition for him to attend AMA for 6 years and 4 years at VMI.

Applications should be received at the AMA Museum postmarked no later than March 1st, 2024.

Jim Towe '60 Memorial Legacy Scholarship Letter:

Legacy Letter

Jim Towe '60 Memorial Legacy Scholarship Application:

Legacy Application Form

Louise McVey Leonard - Robert P. Leonard Memorial Letter

McVey-Leonard Letter

Louise McVey Leonard - Robert P. Leonard Memorial Scholarship

McVey-Leonard Application Form

Applicants should look at the scoring Rubric to see how to model their application.

Scholarship Scoring Rubric

M-1 Garand Rifle

RIFLE RAFFLE 2024

Once again, we will be offering a unique and historically important weapon up for raffle. This iconic weapon is credited to be one of the most important tools that won World War II for the Allies. General George S. Patton called it "the greatest battle implement ever devised" Many of you carried the M-1 while at AMA.

The cost is $25 per chance, or five chances for $100. On the form, if you so choose, you can add an additional amount to help us cover the cost of the payment processing fee. There is no limit on the number of chances you may purchase.

Checkout is through our PayPal account **HERE**. It may take a minute or two for the transfer to the PayPal page. Be patient and do not close your browser while waiting. There is an option to use a credit card once you get to the PayPal site. If you'd prefer to pay the museum directly, simple close your browser once you reach the PayPal Site. Print your email purchase confirmation and send that and your check to the museum.

You must be 21 years or older to participate in this raffle.
This raffle is void where prohibited by law.

A monthly pledge from everyone that reads this newsletter means that the future of the Museum will be assured.

SET UP YOUR MONTHLY DONATION HERE

MUSEUM

DOCENT DUTY

THANK YOU!

Trigger '79

Visitors in January

65

busiest since 2020.

Museum Volunteer

***B*e a Volunteer Docent for a weekend...**

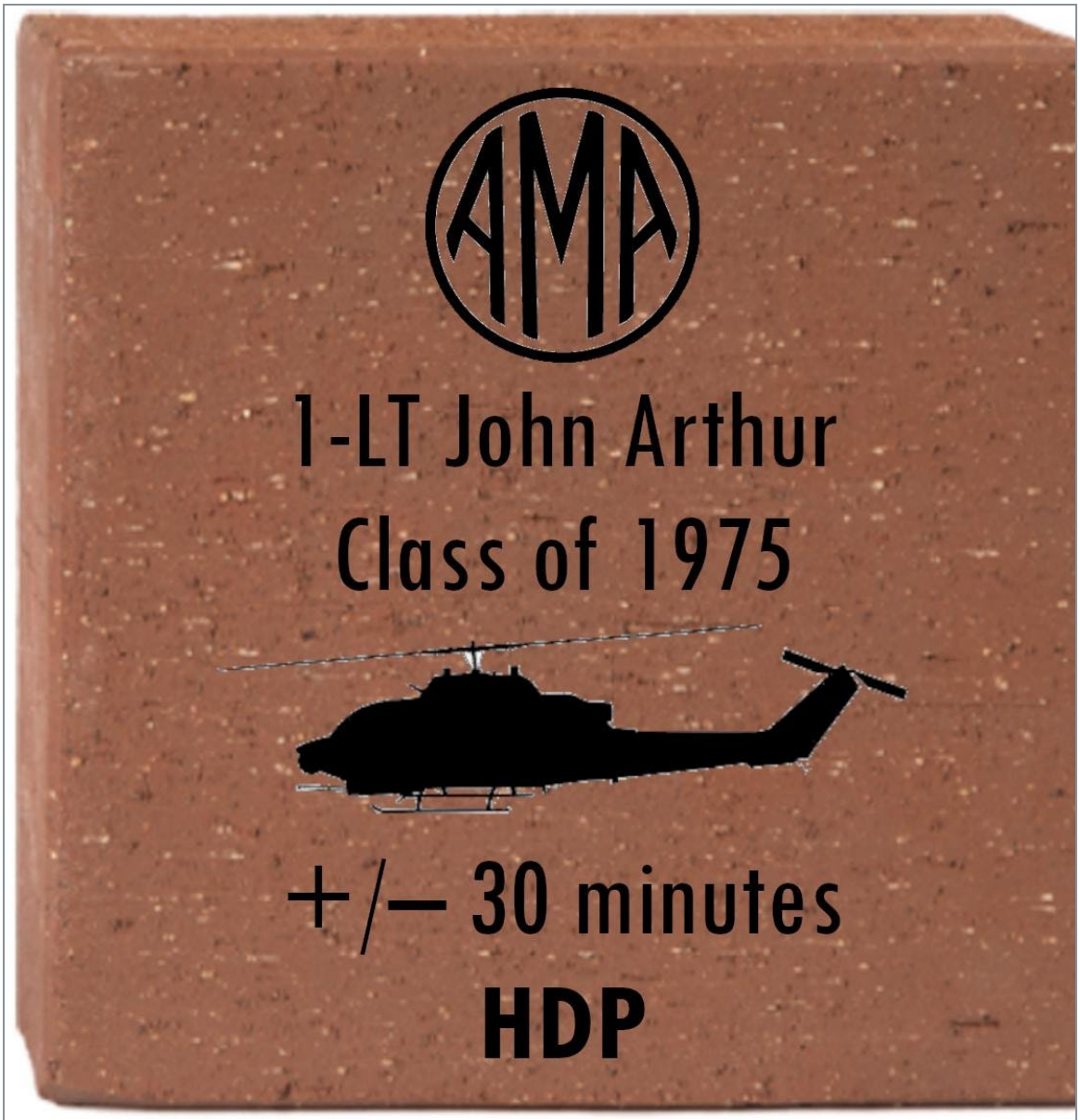
Purchasing a Paver Brick allows you to recognize anyone you knew while attending AMA

All Paver Bricks are placed in a permanent location along the sidewalk running East of the Museum

Visit the Brick virtual map HERE

Please order yours TODAY!

Brick Order Form



Shop at the PX

Notice!

The AMA Alumni Foundation would like to clarify that all of the profits of the merchandise

that is sold through our Museum PX store, the official AMA Facebook page or the AMA webpage, go exclusively to help offset Museum operation costs.

AMA branded merchandise that is sold outside the Museum PX store, an unsanctioned Facebook page or unsanctioned eBay account has no connection or benefit to the AMA Alumni Foundation, Inc. or the AMA Alumni Museum.

17 oz. Mug

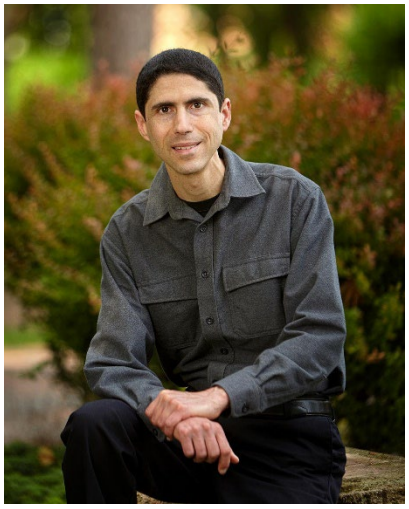
Only $12.00 plus tax and shipping

To order items from the PX, call the Museum at 540-248-2007

Beautiful Wendell August Forge metal serving tray

$50.00

(Limited quantity)



Chris's Corner

Chris Correa, Museum Historian

February 1, 2024

"I Find That There is a Balance…"

Chasing after the odd late payment should've been routine for Charles Roller Jr. In the winter of 1951, he was the principal and nearly omnipotent sole owner of a high-tuition school with about 221 students in its directory **(Recall 1951 pp.129-39)**. I thought that this kind of inquiry would've been common enough to keep a form letter on hand, so I wondered if this February 24 correspondence came from one (skip below the picture for the transcription)

I am again writing you in regard to the balan
of $613.10 now due on your account. I am asking that you please
send me your check for this amount by the 1st March 1951. If you
cannot do this;then please write me and tell me so and I will a
least know that you are a little interested and will give me a
better feeling toward you.

Thanking you for your attention to this matte

I am,

Very truly yours,

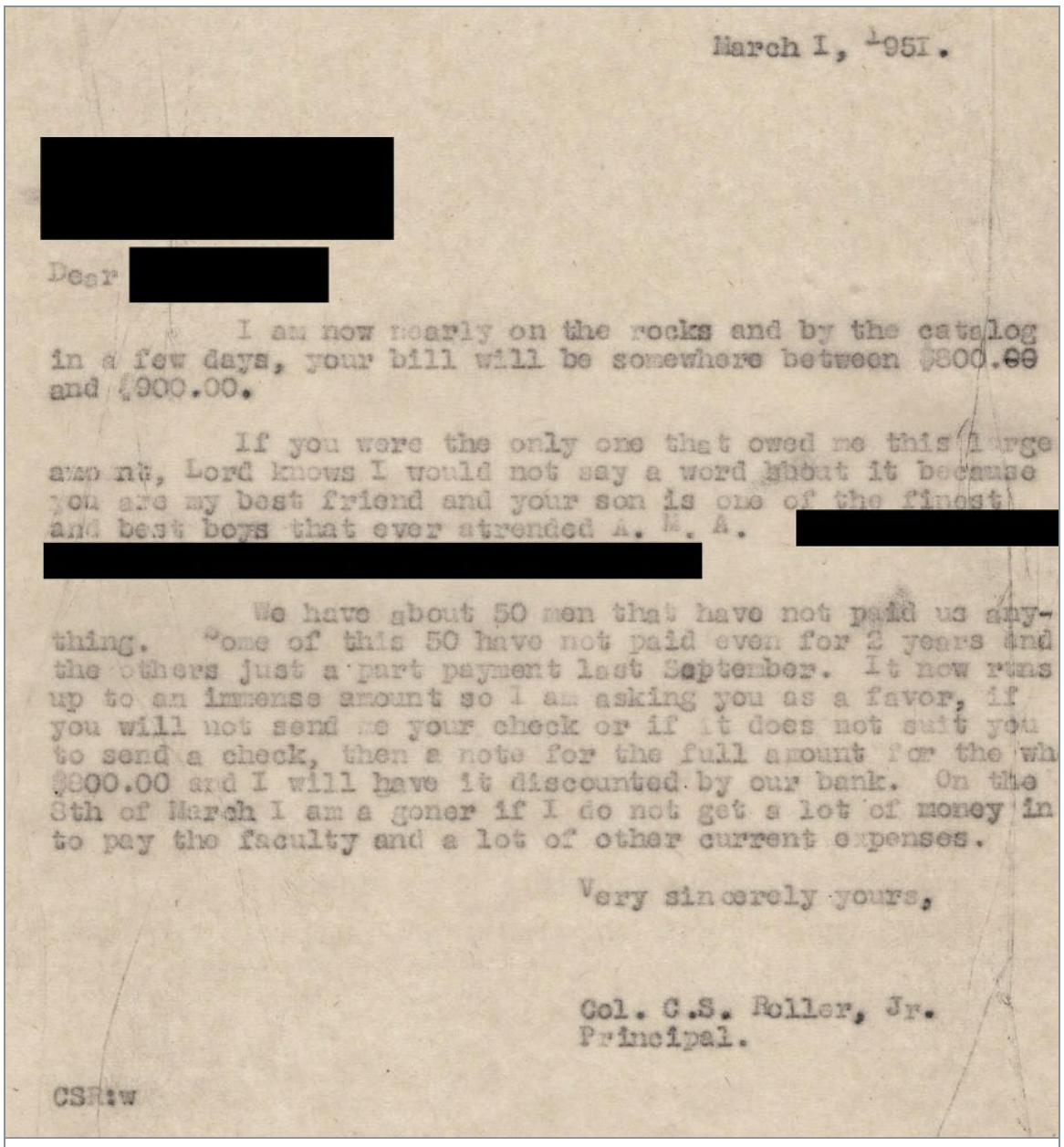
Col. C.S.Roller,Jr.,
Principal.

CSR/f

I am again writing you in regard to the balance of $613.10 now due on your account. I am asking that you please send me your check for this amount by the 1st March 1951. If you cannot do this;[sic] *then please write me and tell me so and I will at least know that you are a little interested and will give me a better feeling toward you.*

This is the earliest document in the student's folder, so we don't know how many letters had already been sent. According to the catalog for 1950-51, tuition, deposits, and fees for the year totaled $1,257.50 (about $15,000 today, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics **CPI Inflation Calculator**). Nearly half of that money was missing, but what's priceless about this letter is what it reveals about the colonel's approach. It's politely formal, but with a bit of a personal edge. It's not about the money; it's about his relationship with the parent. He only wants some response so he can have "a better feeling" for him.

I don't know if anyone else would've gotten the same letter under similar circumstances, but nothing is formulaic about the next letter, dated just 5 days later. This was the scanning test letter that astounded me when I read it in September. Dispensing with "Mr.", Charles opens on a first-name basis (transcription below):



March 1, 1951.

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

I am now nearly on the rocks and by the catalog in a few days, your bill will be somewhere between $800.00 and $900.00.

If you were the only one that owed me this large amount, Lord knows I would not say a word about it because you are my best friend and your son is one of the finest and best boys that ever attended A. M. A. [redacted]

We have about 50 men that have not paid us anything. Some of this 50 have not paid even for 2 years and the others just a part payment last September. It now runs up to an immense amount so I am asking you as a favor, if you will not send me your check or if it does not suit you to send a check, then a note for the full amount for the wh $800.00 and I will have it discounted by our bank. On the 8th of March I am a goner if I do not get a lot of money in to pay the faculty and a lot of other current expenses.

Very sincerely yours,

Col. C.S. Roller, Jr.
Principal.

CSR:w

I am now nearly on the rocks and by the catalog in a few days, your bill will be somewhere between $800.00 and $900.00 [equivalent to $9,500 to $10,700].

If you were the only one that owed me this large amount, Lord knows I would not say a word about it because you are my best

friend and your son is one of the finest and best boys that ever atrended [sic] A.M.A.

We have about 50 men that have not paid us anything. Some of this [sic] *50 have not paid even for 2 years and the others just a part payment last September. It now runs up to an immense amount so I am asking you as a favor, if you will not send me your check or if it does not suit you to send a check, then a note for the full amount for the whole $800.00 and I will have it discounted by our bank. On the 8th of March I am a goner if I do not get a lot of money in to pay the faculty and a lot of other current expenses.*

This onionskin carbon copy is hard to read, but I want you to see it, because if someone quoted Col. Roller sounding panicked, I'd want proof. I'd always thought of this as the early golden age of the school, with the income to match. That's why this letter was a revelation. For AMA, financial distress was not an affliction limited to the 1930s, '70s, and '80s. Cash was short, but not, as I wondered last month, because of excess spending. Parents weren't paying up.

I'd also overlooked that, yes, the academy's reputation was growing, but it was still far from its mid-60s population peak, and it was recovering from a recent slump. The **1943-44 catalog** lists 377 cadets (pp.74-80). Eight years later, the corps was down 41%. According to this letter, roughly 1 in 5 of those accounts were in arrears, so the school was being starved.

Meanwhile, AMA faced a similar situation in ascendence that it did in the 70s, as Bob Hume '63 told me:
By the time I returned [as faculty] in 1970, enrollment was less than two hundred, but the overall expenses had remained fairly

constant. The big barracks had a floor closed and then a second floor closed, but that wasn't much of a savings. By the time 1983 came around, enrollment was less than one hundred, but operational costs hadn't gone down at the same level. (E-mail January 1, 2024)
Massive buildings have stubborn costs regardless of the number of people using them. Worse for 1951 was having those costs plus feeding and housing for free the equivalent of nearly 3 platoons, some for 2 years. Why let so many skate for so long?

This greatly expands the scope of Col. Roller's generosity. Whatever he spent on Christmas baskets for Ft. Defiance households must've been dwarfed by what he failed to collect from AMA families. Was he overworked? Had this been Col. Tom's job when he was alive? Now, Charles had an adjutant, Russel Fifer, who had an assistant, Will Parkins. He also had a secretary, Mary Belle Walker (**Recall 1951 p28**). Were they not enough manpower? Was he unwilling to delegate the messy task of pursuing delinquencies? Was his relationship with the parent and son preventing him from sounding harsh? Was his heart, as I suggested last month, just too big to play hardball over a cadet's future? Even in this letter, there's not a hint of an ultimatum. He only stokes the parent's pity for the man solely responsible for the school's survival. "On the 8th of March I am a goner[….]"

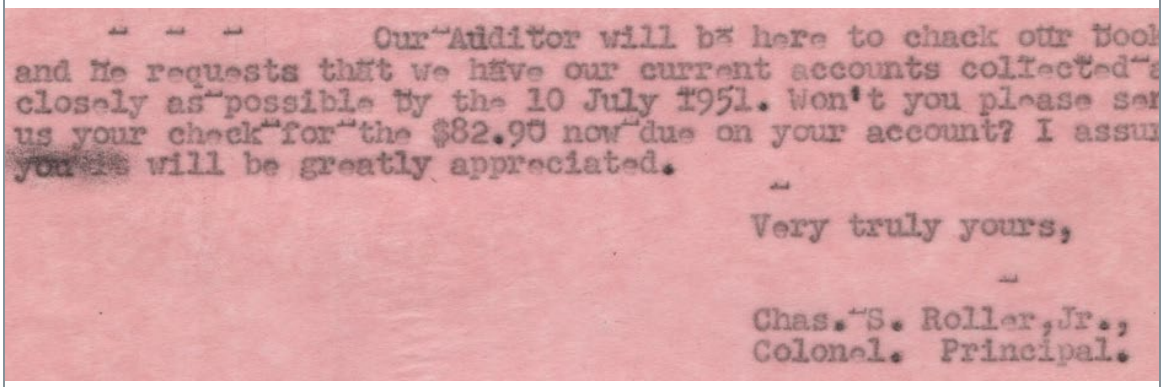
In this case, it worked. Three days before the deadline, the parent responded with a check and promissory note for $400 each, both enclosed with a letter that ended with "Good luck & best wishes". There was nothing in apology or explanation for the delay. If he was Big Boy's "best friend", he wasn't exactly showing it. On the other hand, maybe the two men had settled the matter on the phone in between letters. Maybe the parent's payment

went out before Roller's plea came in. It's frustrating not knowing what I don't know.

That settled this account for now. What about the 49 others? We won't know until we find their files, assuming they've survived.

For now, I kept reading what was in my hands. There was another, much smaller bill at issue that summer, and Col. Roller continued his light, persistent touch in coaxing the father to pay (transcription below):

July 2:



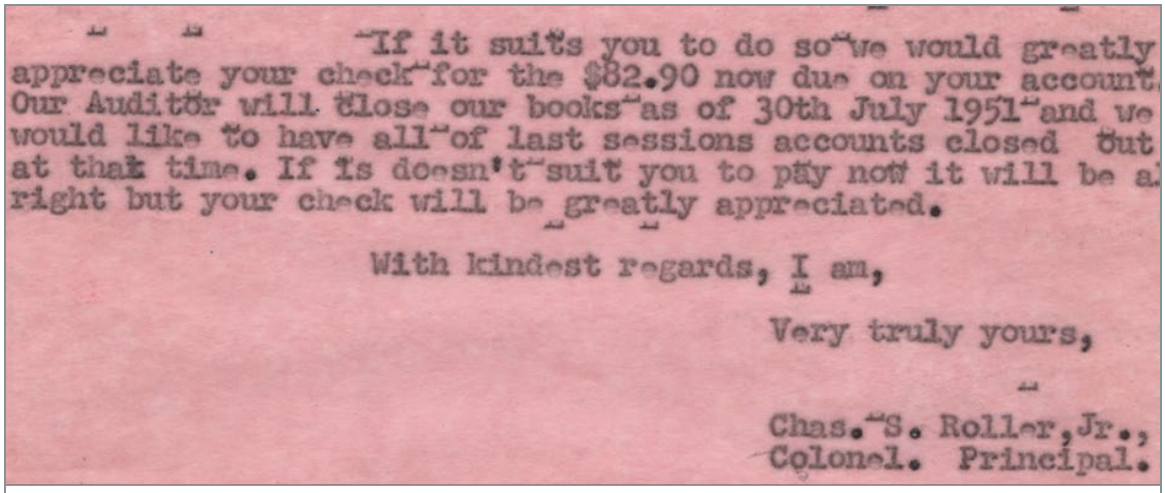
Our Auditor will be here to chack our book
and He requests that we have our current accounts collected
closely as possible by the 10 July 1951. Won't you please se
us your check for the $82.90 now due on your account? I assu
you it will be greatly appreciated.

Very truly yours,

Chas. S. Roller, Jr.,
Colonel. Principal.

"Our Auditor will be here to chack [sic] our books and he requests that we have our current accounts collected as closely as possible by the 10 July 1951. Won't you please send us your check for the $82.90 now due on your account? I assure you it will be greatly appreciated."

July 19:



"If it suits you to do so we would greatly appreciate your check for the $82.90 now due on your account. Our Auditor will close our books as of 30th July 1951 and we would like to have all of last sessions accounts closed out at that time. If is doesn't suit you to pay now it will be all right but your check will be greatly appreciated.

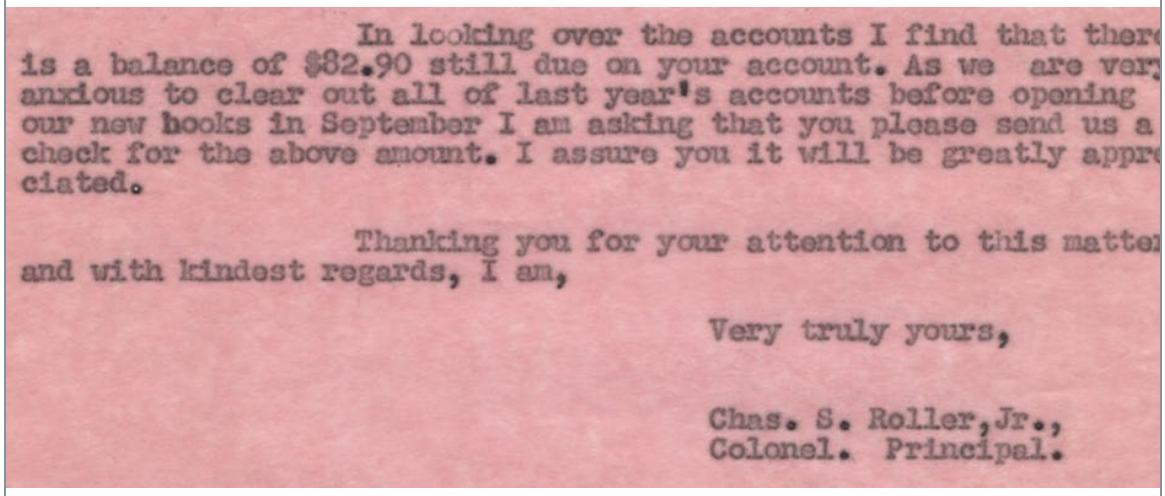
With kindest regards, I am,

Very truly yours,

Chas. S. Roller, Jr.,
Colonel. Principal.

"If it suits you to do so we would greatly appreciate your check for the $82.90 now due on your account. Our Auditor will close our books as of 30th July 1951 and we would like to have all of last sessions [sic] accounts closed out at that time. If is [sic] doesn't suit you to pay now it will be all right but your check will be greatly appreciated."

August 17:



In looking over the accounts I find that there is a balance of $82.90 still due on your account. As we are very anxious to clear out all of last year's accounts before opening our new books in September I am asking that you please send us a check for the above amount. I assure you it will be greatly appreciated.

Thanking you for your attention to this matter and with kindest regards, I am,

Very truly yours,

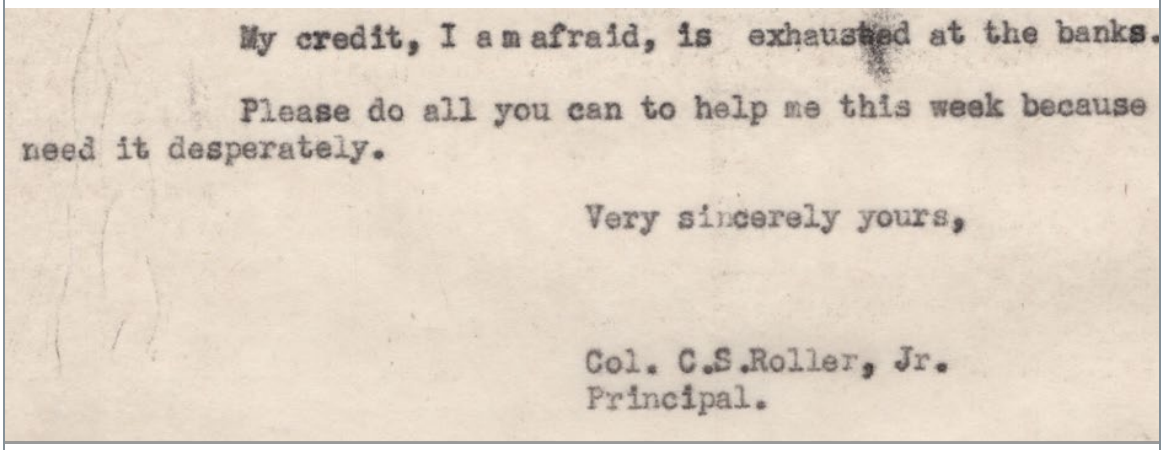
Chas. S. Roller, Jr.,
Colonel. Principal.

"In looking over the accounts I find that there is a balance of $82.90 still due on your account. As we are very anxious to clear out all of last year's accounts before opening our new books in

September I am asking that you please send us a check for the above amount. I assure you it will be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your attention to this matter[….]"

Again, these are appeals for a favor, not demands for what's owed and nowhere near a threat. With the school's resources at stake, why is Roller taking the same tack as 5 months ago and hoping for better results? Maybe it was no longer critical, if the 49 other accounts had been settled and this small sum was all that remained. Again, we won't know until we find the files.

Whatever happened with the others, it didn't help, because on December 7, Roller revealed that his predicament was more critical than ever.



My credit, I am afraid, is exhausted at the banks.

Please do all you can to help me this week because I need it desperately.

Very sincerely yours,

Col. C.S.Roller, Jr.
Principal.

"My credit, I am afraid, is exhausted at the banks. Please do all you can to help me this week because I need it desperately."

What was happening here?! Who else knew about this? Wasn't it perilous to admit that the school was nearing insolvency? That could drive current and prospective families to a competitor with sounder finances. After all, these military schools were private businesses in a marketplace. Maybe Charles reserved his

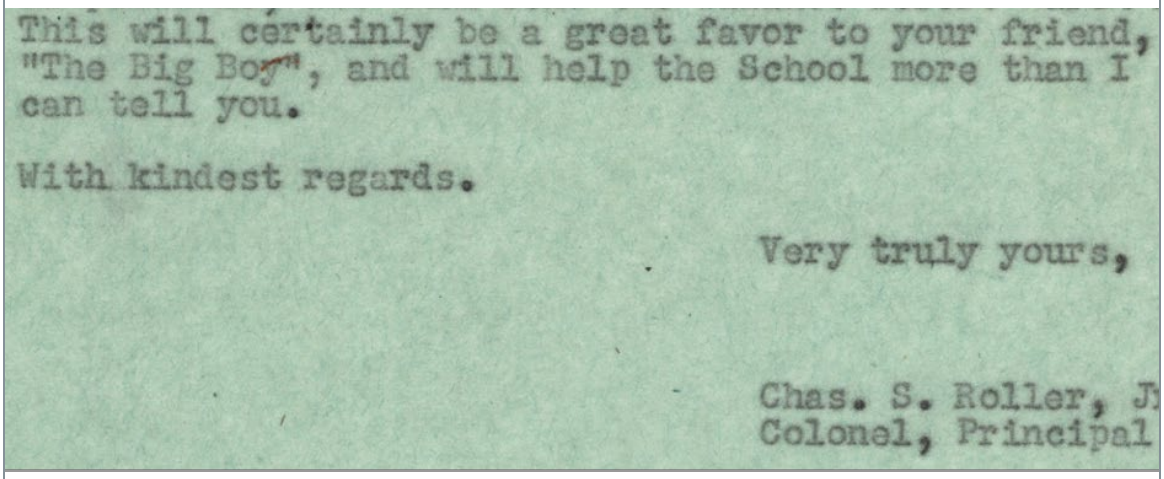
diplomacy and candor for this one parent that he knew well, and he only used a *pay-up-or-else* tone on the others. We don't know, but even in this case, why were Roller's "desperate" times not calling for desperate measures, only more requests? More to the point, how could he be at the end of his rope with the banks, how many banks were involved, and how quickly had it come to this? In short, what happened to the Roller family's money?

The question of their wealth has intrigued me for a long time. Where did it come from, and where did it go? I have virtually no evidence for an answer. In his 1947 master's thesis, **Emmet Rhoades** names William "Elder Billy" Crawford, an elder of the Stone Church, as Charles Sr.'s main benefactor in 1879 (p.30). There are no known records after that. Even so, tremendous capital had to have poured into the building and modernization campaign between 1909 and 1929, including the exquisite accommodations of both Beaumont and Whitehall. The only information we have on the funding is an unsourced line in Rhoades pointing to local bank loans and the sale of $1,000 bonds, but "[t]he last bond was recalled on November 1, 1946, at which time the academy was free of all bonded indebtedness"(p.76). Evidently then, the buildings weren't the albatross. What was? So far, we know about dozens of past-due accounts with high balances and/or long terms, enrollment still in recovery, and expensive infrastructure. Are these enough to explain the colonel's maxed-out credit?

I kept reading.

Two softer letters followed, but on March 3, 1952, we learn that the walls were closing in on Charles. This one balance was about to top a thousand dollars, with 75 other holdouts and deadlines

looming: “On March 8 we have our quarterly payment on all farm work and the big payments for the faculty and managers. Then on March 15 we have the national and state income taxes to meet.” He implores the parent, “with the greatest hesitation”, to send as much money as he can “[a]s a friend of the school”:



This will certainly be a great favor to your friend, "The Big Boy", and will help the School more than I can tell you.

With kindest regards.

Very truly yours,

Chas. S. Roller, Jr
Colonel, Principal

“This will certainly be a great favor to your friend, ‘The Big Boy’, and will help the School more than I can tell you. With kindest regards.”

This letter tells us what expenses needed immediate coverage, but there’s still no indication of any prior event that had left the school so vulnerable.

Finally, after 22 days with no response, The Big Boy leveled with the father in a letter that delivered a bombshell. Hyperbole? No. Given how suddenly and severely it gouged the school’s resources, and especially given the people and emotions involved, “bombshell” is appropriate. It suggests why Roller withheld this information for so long. Just as Christmas baskets were a trivial liability compared to unremitted tuition,

what Charles was forced to give up to save his school just a few years earlier humbles all of that missing money.

His accusations bring back the question of burden of proof and tie it in a knot. Either Charles lied, or two others aimed to enrich themselves and "cared nothing in the world about Augusta Military Academy." The dilemma for us is that giving either side the benefit of the doubt presumes something defamatory about the other with none of them here to defend themselves. Of the 3 people involved, the last died in 2010.

Then why not bury the story? It was all deep behind the scenes with no effect on the cadet experience. Nothing learned now will materially change anything. The school is still closed. What happened, happened. What's the point of meddling in the past, especially when conclusive answers are so scarce? Why can't we just let the dead rest and celebrate all the good that we know came out of the academy?

I had to think about this a lot, because finding, telling, and preserving stories is my job, so I should know the reasons and the rules. I'm no authority on this, so here are the two principles that feel right to me.

To understand what the school did and did not become for students over its last 37 years is an essential story. Granted, even if students heard a rumor about financial drama roiling among adults in the background, I doubt they would've cared. Military, social, and academic pressures imposed enough drama of their own. The cadets adapted to the academy they were given. It's all they knew, but what they and their successors would be given was being decided by just a few adults.

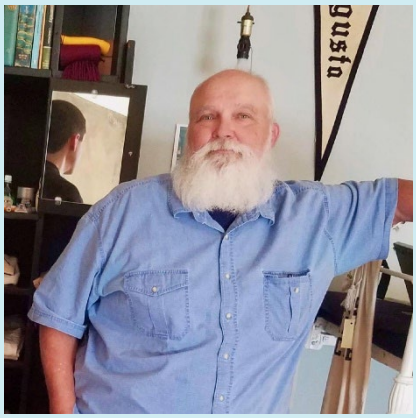
Then, it's important to identify the mysteries and partial mysteries to temper how emphatically we draw conclusions about the past. Otherwise, it's too easy to assume that the answers are simple and obvious. *These were the heroes. Those were the villains. This person mattered. That person didn't. The End.* If we're lucky, then this simplistic thinking only makes us learn fewer lessons, but the greater worry is that we learn wrong lessons. Instead, being clear about what's unknown alerts us to the soft spots in the pillars of our understanding. It cautions us that those pillars can only support so much certainty. That is its own piece of necessary knowledge, so lacking a fact is a type of fact in itself.

So why not wait until I know everything before sharing it? That would be ideal, because an unfinished picture can mislead in very different ways depending on the missing pieces. Likewise, an incomplete story is a kind of falsehood that risks impugning the innocent. I'd like to have the whole story airtight before "going to press", but we'll never have the whole story, because we already know how much can never be found. Then consider how much we don't know is missing. More to the point, we're racing the calendar just to get these documents preserved. Knowing and synthesizing what's in them will take years longer than we have. This is why I want to share what I know as I learn it. We'll all make sense of it together as best we can, all the while remembering that a complete and inarguable truth might be out of reach.

The good news is that there is more to learn. There are more documents to read, and so there will be more story to tell. Where the key documents are among the thousands we hold

but haven't read is anybody's guess. Consider that the breakthrough I'll share next month I found not in a personal journal, safe deposit box, or secret room under Whitehall. Instead, it was in a student file, apparently untouched for 72 years until I randomly grabbed it from among dozens of others. The file just happened to be for a student whose father was a confidant of the colonel. With at least 29 more boxes just like this one, we've barely begun to discover the sources that will deepen, revise, and expand the valuable lessons of AMA's history.

Thanks for reading.



vanBreemen's Expressions

February 1, 2024

Common Knowledge

by: Rich vanBreemen

One of the things that causes Chris and I a great deal of anguish in our research is something known as "Common Knowledge." In short, it means that everyday activities, photos or papers were not documented because everyone knows that! How many times have you gone through a box of old photos and thought, "Who the hell are these people?" The person(s) who took the photo knew that was Uncle Jim and Aunt Mabel at the lake in

the summer of 1956, so why write it down? Other people of the time knew that was Uncle Jim and Aunt Mabel at the lake in the summer of 1956 as well, so no other commentary was required. Put those photos away in a box for 50 years and then see who knows what the heck is going on. So many of the stories we attempt to track down are hindered by this issue.

Hopefully you haven't forgotten my previous articles about Cadet Schoechle who died on campus in 1961 as the result of a freak accident. In January, we had several alums visit the museum at various times. After one such visit, Chris got a follow up email which read: *"Chris, I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation yesterday. I could not help to think about Tim (Schoechle), the cadet that got killed on the hay ride. I was pretty positive that there is a water fountain near the anti tank gun that has a Memorial plaque to him. I may be wrong."*

WHAT? I've never heard about or seen anything referencing a fountain on campus. It would seem plausible that the family and the school would want to do something, but why was this the FIRST we ever heard of it. In a previous life, I was an EMT and when doing a patient assessment, we learned to not ask leading questions. You ask, "Are you injured? Where does it hurt?" The patient will tell you what they know / feel. If you ask, "Does your left arm hurt?" invariably. They will agree with you even if it doesn't. Unfortunately, this is what happened to us in an attempt to follow up on the fountain claim. "Hey Buddy – do you remember there being a fountain out here?" "Why yes – I do, (I think)." That is of no use from a research standpoint.

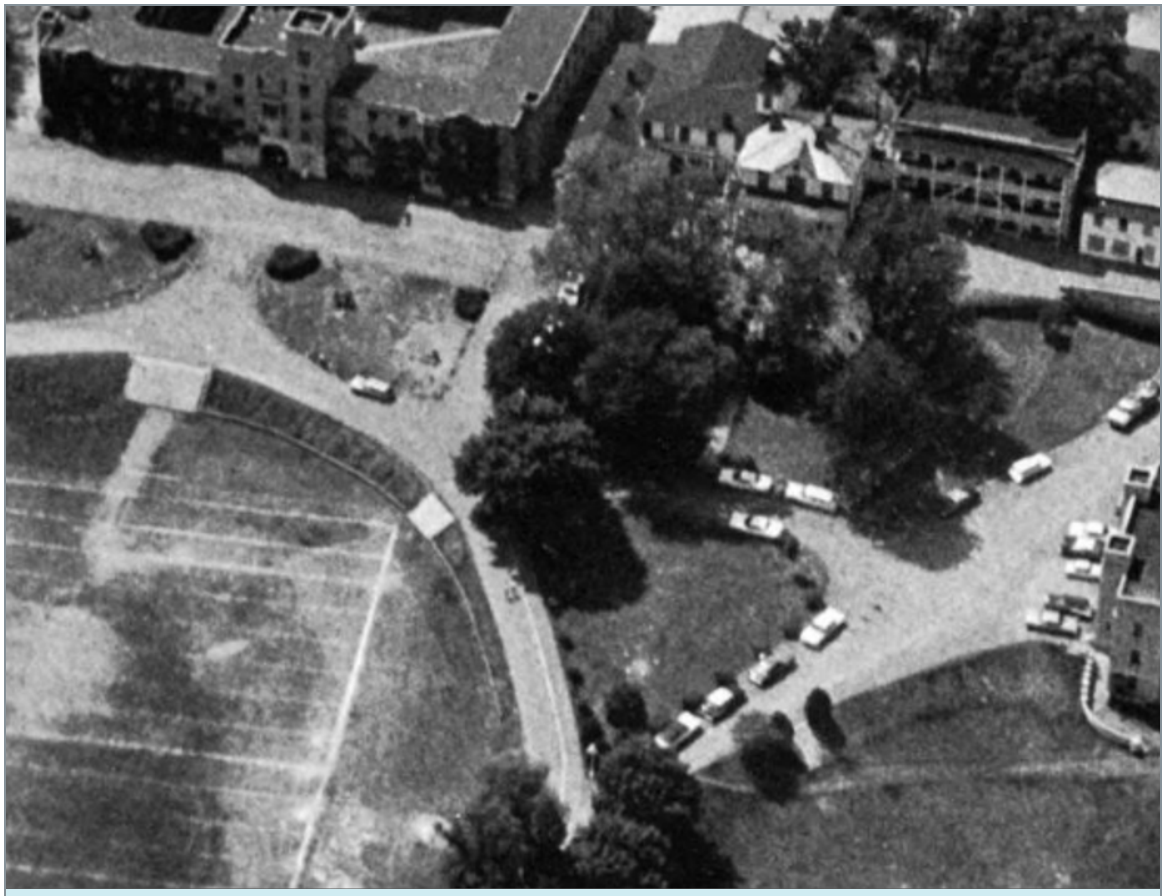
Memories can fade or be faulty or worse, be influenced. Photographs, however, are pretty accurate – especially if they are properly captioned. So Chris and I turned our attention to RECALLS and BAYONETS for the appropriate time frame. You'll never guess what we found? NOTHING. We couldn't find a single reference to a memorial or fountain or photograph. You would

think that something like that would be a favorite gathering place for a family photo or with a visiting girlfriend. At this point, it looked like the fountain was just imaginary.

BUT, was it? In front of the museum, on the triangular plot of grass there is a short cement walkway and a bench. Beneath the plastic drum is a pipe which sticks up about 3 feet; the bench is covering this odd device.

We've had a fair amount of discussion as to what it could be, and how would this fit in with the fountain story, or when did it show up, etc. Nothing could be determined, and the weather hasn't been cooperative enough for us to poke around outside. Why is it that there are no photos of this area – at least not that we've seen. Could this be another victim of COMMON KNOWLEDGE? Everyone knew about the fountain and plaque so why make a big deal about it? Perhaps, except we don't. It is hard to tell from the photo, but looking towards the gate from the bench, you see the cannon. Mind you, that was installed long after the school was closed. That area used to be just grass.

Which leads us to this areal photo of the campus in 1964:



In the center of the photograph, you see the triangular grassy spot that sits in front of the museum house. When you are pulling in with your car today, this is where the road splits left and right and the cannon is pointing at your face. It is at THAT spot that we can see some kind of circular impression with what appears to be evenly spaced poles around it. There is even a walkway coming up to it from the right-side parking area. Could this have been the memorial? If so, what happened to it? The area is now taken over by the cannon and its cement slab base, so any trace of what was there is gone forever.

It's at this point we fling our arms up to the heavens and cry UNCLE. I'm hoping this article will trigger some long-lost memories or (please oh please oh please) a photograph of this area. For now,

it’s just a cool story looking for validation. Until then, we don’t get to share it with anyone else. Bummer.

Doug Pennock's Viewpoint

February 1, 2024

Dear Readers,

I decided to do something different with my Viewpoint message this month. This experiment actually serves two purposes, it saves me some time and effort by not having to think of something enlightening to write about, and it will allow me to highlight some of the things that our board members do behind the scenes.

The following commentary by Marc Aronson ’68 was sent to several board members and myself on Tuesday January 29. Marc has been a member of the board for over two years and is

up for reelection this year. I asked him to join the Fundraising committee last year and he grudgingly accepted.

Marc also sits on the Scholarship and PR Committees. The note that I am sharing with you is Marc doing what he does. Enjoy the read, and please make good use of the return envelope!

Doug out

Gentlemen:

Or to quote an old employee "nothing hard is ever easy."
Here is the after-action report:
My fundraising letters are finally out. Yesterday I mailed 946. Today I mailed 615. The total is 1,561.

Some months back I had this idea. I spent an hour talking with my in-house writer developing and working on the concept. It was then posted to my computer desktop where it sat for some time (a month?) until one day, one Sunday, I gathered enough brain power to move forward with the idea.

Five hours later I had a pretty good draft. The draft was massaged in the office with me and my writer, and then sent out to a few folks for comments. Adjustment were made for the few comments I received, and a look and feel were developed. Another hour or so.

1,600 #10 envelopes were ordered.
1,600 #9 return envelopes were ordered.
1,600 sheets of paper for the photocopier were ordered.
4,800 +/- pressure sensitive labels were purchased from the company. (One for the outgoing address on the #10 envelope. One for the return address for the #10 envelope. One for the return address on the #9 envelope.)

All of this stuff was then taken home as I could not affix all these labels while I was working.

As time permitted, me and my fiancé attached the labels. At full speed, with no interruptions, we could affix 500 an hour (the math says this took around 10 hours). Whew.

I then copied the three pages on my high-speed office copier (4,800 pages +/-). Then the copier broke(!), and I had to wait until a new part came in and I installed it. Another day shot. Another hour to make copies.

Next the pages were to be folded and inserted (with a #9 envelope) by the high-speed folder-inserter we have. Uh, that would not work. My employee could not get the very finicky machine to stuff the paper into the envelopes. Oh well... but she did get the three papers to be folded. Another few hours of her time before her workday started.
I came in the office by myself this past Saturday and stuffed all the envelopes at the rate of 500 an hour (I have 51 years of experience of stuffing an envelope!). I very carefully stacked them in postal hods with the flaps out (as I was taught a zillion years ago) so they would be sealed by the postage machine. About five hours of work.

Early yesterday Monday before work my employee told me we no longer put the envelopes in the machine with the flaps out and that they all needed repositioned with the flaps flat. (Uh, well, OK) Darn. Another hour.

Both of us ran the refolded envelopes through the machine until, well, there was this terrible squealing sound. Yes, the machine broke! Really? Repair person called. Came in today. Turned out there was a bearing that needed to be greased. In all his years of working on these machines he has only seen once. (Of course!) Another hour.
I'm sure I'm missing something.

Donation to the effort:
Postage: $999.04.
Envelopes, paper, labels total $276.46
Labor: free
Job well done: $1,000,000.00 in satisfaction.

Hopefully we will soon get responses and all the effort (and aggravations) will have been worth the time and energy.
I would appreciate feedback once in a while if we get a response.
It's been my pleasure. Call any time!

Whew! What was I thinking...

Marc A.

Editor's Note:
The following expressions are mine alone. I look forward to your feedback. You may contact me directly at:
chairman.amafoundation@amaalumni.org

The Museum Newsletter is written and prepared by Doug Pennock and edited by Trudy Pennock

SHENANDOAH VALLEY BEST 2023 WINNER HARRISONBURG RADIO GROUP

AUGUSTA MILITARY ACADEMY MUSEUM
- Fort Defiance, Virginia -

MISSION STATEMENT "To preserve the traditions of the Augusta Military Academy and to honor the memory of the life and times of its alumni, faculty, staff, and

supporting families through permanent and temporary exhibits and diligent conservation the museum's collections of artifacts, archives and photographs."

The AMA MUSEUM is operated by the AMA Alumni Foundation, which is a 501(c)3, non-profit organization. The museum is manned by a paid staff. Former cadets volunteer their time and talent most every month. Funding for the museum is totally dependent on tax-exempt financial gifts and donations made by the alumni, former faculty, and friends of Augusta Military Academy, as well as the community and visitors to the museum.

Augusta Military Academy Museum | 540-248-3007
| **Museum@AMAalumni.org** | **http://www.amaalumni.org**
1640 Lee Highway
P.O. Box 101
Fort Defiance, VA 24437