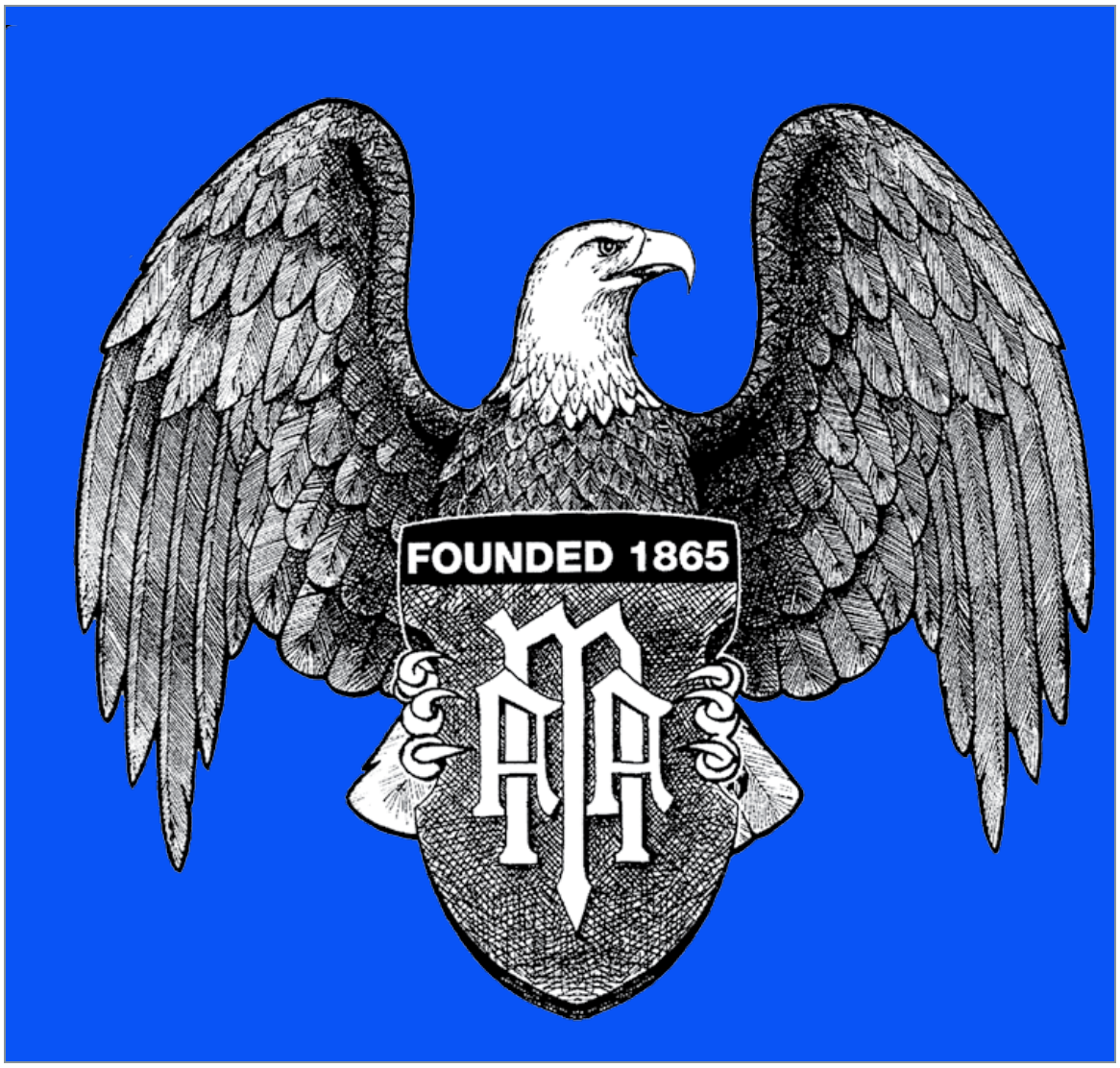
Museum of Augusta Military Academy News



Visit our Website

Ad Astra Per Aspera

MUSEUM OF AUGUSTA MILITARY ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

April - 2024

Chairman's Message

April 1, 2024

Dear Alumni and friends,

Well, winter has come and gone here at latitude 18.23 degrees North and 66.04 degrees West.

The thermometer will only drop down to the mid 70's at night, and hover around 88 at mid afternoon, so I can now use the swimming pool every afternoon, since the water temperature has climbed above the frigid 76 degrees it drops to sometime in mid-December.

I know, you snowbirds think I'm a wus! Yet I can assure you that my thermostatic sentiments are shared by my 3 plus million fellow islanders!

On a more serious note, the AMA Museum operation continues to hum along. The sign on Rt. 11 that was destroyed in December has been replaced. It is similar to the original sign in size, but we changed the contents slightly and thanks to a new PVC finish, we will no longer need to paint it!

Rich, Chris and Keeley, are engaged in all aspects of recording our history, welcoming visitors and paying the bills.

Herb Maher and Lee Ramsey have Reunion 2024 well under control. Herb told me that he is very happy by the fact that Reunion Sponsorship funding is running ahead of last year and reunion registration is beginning to flow. Even M1 Rifle raffle tickets are selling!
Marc Aronson's ABC fundraising letter has had a good response. As of March 31, we have received nearly $8,000 in donations! A special shout out to Mrs Lorraine Aronson, Marc's mother, who also sent a donation!

New AMA Alumni Foundation Director nominations deadline was March 31. There were no nominations submitted other than the five current directors whose term is up this year. All five had stated their interest in serving another 3-year term.

The Director elections begin today, April 1, vial electronic vote. Election Results will be announced after electronic votes end on April 30. You can vote **HERE**.

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.

AMA Museum sign is back and looking good!

MUSEUM
of
Augusta Military Academy
GIFT SHOPPE
Historical!
A Virginia
Landmark!
CLOSED
VOTED
BEST
MUSEUM

2024 AMA Alumni Foundation, Inc.

Election 2024

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 expressed their desire to serve another term:

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

VOTING TIMELINES

VOTE HERE

- **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 Alumni Reunion 2024
September 5-7

Headquarters Hotel
Hotel 24 South (Stonewall Jackson)

40 years later. We won't forget

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.

Register for Reunion 2024 HERE

This year's Tour: Jeff Slaven's Cattle Ranch
Location: Weyers Cave, VA
Directions: On I-81, take exit 235. head west toward Route 11. Turn right onto Route 11, heading north. Travel approximately a mile, and turn left onto Burketown Road. Travel approximately 0.7 mile and look for a sign for Cattlemen's Supply Truck Entrance (gravel driveway and blackboard fence) on right.

Thursday, September 5th

9:00 am – 12:00 pm AMA Alumni Foundation Board meeting @ Blueridge Room
10:00 am – 4:00 pm AMA Museum (OPEN ALL WEEKEND)
1:00 pm – Midnight Hospitality Suite @ Skyline Room
LUNCH ON YOUR OWN!
5:00 pm – 8:00 pm Registration @ Shenandoah Ballroom
5:00 pm – 8:00 pm Hors d'oeuvres & Appetizers @ Skyline Room

Friday, September 6th

BREAKFAST ON YOUR OWN!
9:00 am – 11:00 am Band Members Breakfast @ Hotel 24 South
9:00 am – 1:00 pm Golf @ "Winter Green Resort Golf Course"
10:00 am – 2:00 pm Sporting Clays @ "Flying Rabbit Sporting Clays"
11:00 am – 1:00 pm Tour @ "Jeff Slaven's Cattle Ranch"

10:00 am – 4:00 pm Registration open @ Shenandoah Ballroom
1:00 pm – 6:00 pm Hospitality Suite @ Skyline room
LUNCH ON YOUR OWN!
5:00 pm – 7:00 pm Registration @ Shenandoah Ballroom
6:00 pm – 7:00 pm Cocktails @ Shenandoah Ballroom (ATTIRE: Business Casual)
7:00 pm – 9:00 pm Dinner @ Shenandoah Ballroom (ATTIRE: Business Casual)
9:00 pm – Midnight Hospitality Suite @ Skyline Room

Saturday, September 7th

8:00 am – 9:00 am Breakfast @ Shenandoah Ballroom
9:00 am – 10:00 am Annual membership meeting @ Shenandoah Ballroom
11:00 am – 11:30 am "Founders Day" Ceremony @ Augusta Stone Church Cemetery
12:00 pm – 2:00 pm Lunch @ AMA Gym “Mission Barbeque”
Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony
2:00 pm – 6:00 pm Hospitality Suite @ Skyline Room
2:00 pm – 6:00 pm Fellowship time “You’re on your own!”
5:00 pm – 6:00 pm Registration Open @ Shenandoah Ballroom
6:00 pm – 7:00 pm Cocktails @ Shenandoah Ballroom (ATTIRE: Casual)

7:00 pm – 9:00 pm Dinner @ Shenandoah Ballroom (ATTIRE: Casual)
9:00 pm – Midnight Hospitality Suite @ Skyline Room

REUNION SPONSORS NEEDED!

Help Make Reunion 2024 the best one ever!
Become a Reunion Sponsor

Individual sponsorships are the reason that we have excellent events and meals at our annual get together. The last three Alumni Reunion were so successful because so many of you generously sponsored part or an entire venue.
We expect this year's turnout to be similar to last years, so please help us out.

Following is a list of venues that are available to sponsor:

THURSDAY NIGHT/HOSPITALITY $1,500 - Jeff Wenzel

FRIDAY BANQUET $6,000.00

SATURDAY MORNING BREAKFAST $3,500

SATURDAY LUNCH $4,200.00 - Anonymous

SATURDAY DINNER $5,500 - Marc Aronson - ($2,750)

REGISTRATION $1,500 - Anonymous

FLOWERS $500 - Jeff Wenzel

Band Co. Breakfast $500 - Anonymous

Our estimated expenses for the reunion is $23,200
We have received $10,950.

Sponsorship Shortfall

$12,250

ABC Fundraiser Letter

Status Report

As of March 31, 2024, Marc Aronson's ABC donation letter has raised $5,500!
These funds will go directly into the AMA Museum general operating fund. Thank you to all that have written a check, and thank you to you Ladies and Gentlemen that are surely going to show your generosity towards the AMA Museum straightaway if not sooner!!

The deadline to submit candidates for the AMA Sports Hall of fame has passed.
Winners will be announced in the June Newsletter

AMA Legacy Scholarship Season

Brandon Patrick Jerialis, Grandson to Lemuel Albert Smith III, AMA class of 1966, was the only Scholarship applicant this year.

Candidate selection will be announced in the May Newsletter

PACKAGED WITH DESICCANT
DO NOT OPEN
UNTIL READY FOR USE OR INSPECTION
N335
8 FUZES PD M557
LOT MA-14-139A
LOADED 3-09

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.

MUSEU
M

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

DOCENT DUTY

THANK YOU!

Brian Miller '67

Elizabeth Andrews
Professor Charles S. Roller's Great-great Granddaughter

Elizabeth has spent over 30 hours at the museum over the last 2 months scanning her personal historical family photographs and documents and collaborating with Chris with his research.

Thank You Elizabeth

Visitors in March

61

Museum Volunteer

***Be* a Volunteer Docent for a weekend...**

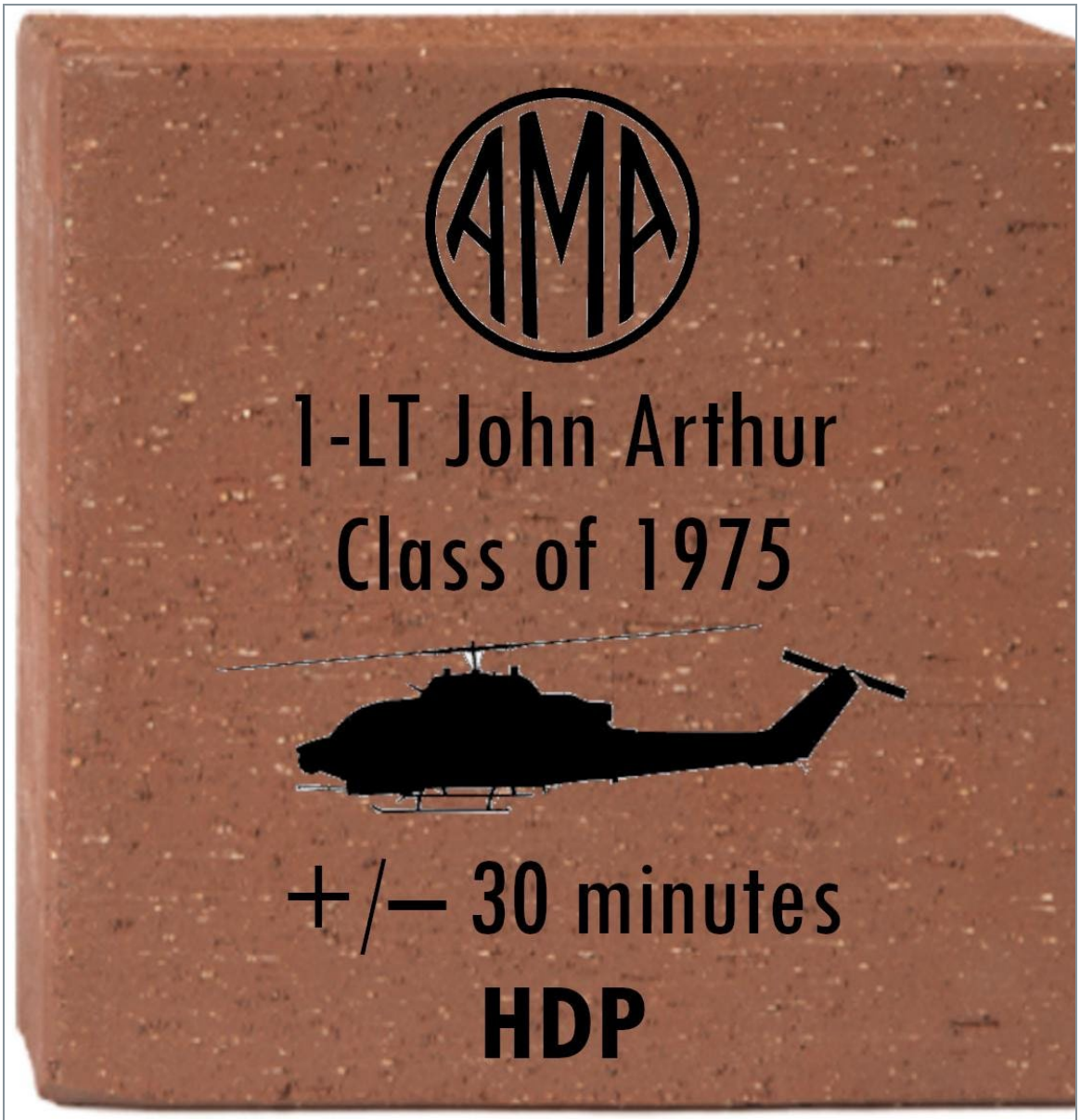
Purchasing a Paver Brick allows you to recognize anyone you knew while attending AMA

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.

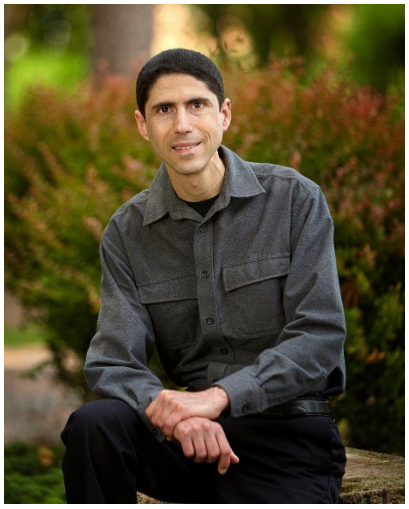
17 oz. Mug
Only $14.00 (Plus tax and shipping)

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

April 1, 2024

Ad fontes!

This was supposed to be the climactic conclusion of my trilogy on the 1948 sale of AMA. It's not. I choked. I can rattle off the facts, but I can't forge them into a narrative that conveys how important, complex, and interesting this story is. It must be told, but not by me. I found someone who can. You'll have the results next month.

For now, a smaller, much older story. It's might seem like **inside baseball**. There's no family drama or stunning revelations, but it tells you what matters to us at the museum, what we're trying to accomplish, and how we do it.

My 20th century U.S. history professor, Kenneth Kurz, urged us at the beginning of the term to always be asking "what do I know, and how do I know that I know it?" I have his voice in my head whenever I learn something here. Is this information from the source or from a messenger? If the latter, is there a chain from the messenger's knowledge all the way back to the source or just to another messenger?

This has been especially relevant for the basics of AMA's origins. Prof. Charles S. Roller bought the land for his school on December 1, 1879. How do I know? Because Duke Fancher said so. As the 1958 valedictorian and First Captain, career *Washington Post* man, and co-founder of this museum, I trust this messenger…but still, how did he know? I'll never be sure. Duke didn't cite any sources in his **history piece** that was the very beginning of my AMA knowledge (I studied it the night before my job interview).

Granted, the odds are negligible that any visitor would even ask how *I* know what I tell them, and it hasn't happened yet. Visitors assume I know what I'm talking about for the same reason I didn't demand citations from the guides at Mount Vernon. Of course they're George Washington experts, right? They work there. They did the reading so that I don't have to. I relied on them just as my visitors rely on me, so this amateur "Historian" has a professional responsibility to deserve their trust.

Also, the best qualified messengers can still be innocently wrong. A historical picture with missing pieces can look like a complete picture of something else, and misinterpretation follows. That's why, as Prof. Kurz reminded my class, all history is provisional. It's what we can prove is true until there's proof that it isn't. We do our best to understand the sources until someone digs up a new source (like a letter in a student file) that makes us reconsider the record.

I had no reason to doubt Duke's date, but it was mysteriously specific. The year 1879 is what Maggie Belle told Emmet Rhodes for his **1947 history** (p26), but I'd never been able to corroborate December 1. Where did Duke see that?

I found it thanks to luck and Sgt. Studer. Long before I arrived, Don had donated to the museum *My Augusta: A Spot of Earth Not a Woman* by the retired Bridgewater College professor and former Bridgewater mayor, C.E. May. I saw it on an upstairs bookshelf for almost 4 years before finally paging through it. It's a thoroughly researched history of northeast Augusta County, including a surprising amount of material on Mt. Sidney, Augusta Stone Church, the Rollers, and then:

"Charles S. Roller bought December 1, 1879, from Thomas P. Wilson for $75 per acre all and whatever land the said Thomas P. Wilson was in possession of on the west side of the Valley Pike; and two years later he bought from Cordelia S. Sullivan and her husband A.D. Sullivan five acres of land lying on the west side of the Valley Pike[….]" (p174)

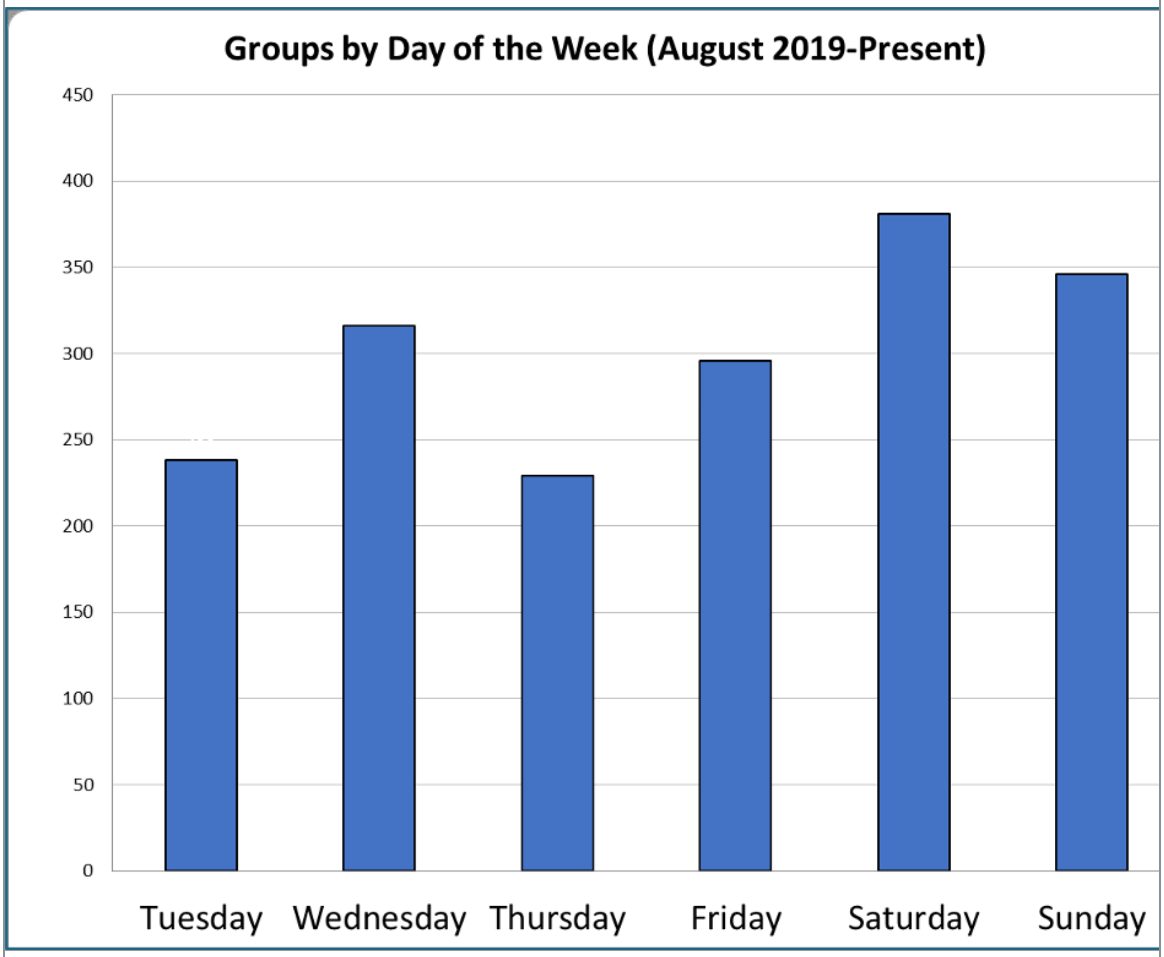
This was probably Duke's source, if for no other reasons than the book was in his museum and it's the only book here where I've found 12-1-79. Prof. May would've made my life easier by using footnotes, but at least he made a bibliography, which includes:

Augusta County Court, Clerk's Office, Staunton, Virginia
Deed Books, 1745-1986

Field Trip!

I'd hoped that the county courthouse, library, and historical society would have important sources for us, but as a staff of 3, there'd been no practical way for any of us to leave the museum during their business hours. Deciding to be closed to the public on Tuesdays limits public access to the museum, but it's given the staff the chance to finally go looking for the off-site records of our origin.

It was an informed decision. I get every willing visitor to sign the guest book, and Keeley enters the data into my spreadsheet that's a pretty good tracker of key statistics: foot traffic by the day, month, and year; the number and size of groups; and how they found us. It only starts with August 2019, the month before I joined the museum, and I won't claim it's scientific, but I'd like to think it's in sight of reality:



(Wait, Wednesday is busier than Friday? This might reflect our Noble Legends speaker series being on third Wednesdays during Spring and Summer. I can't explain Tuesday edging out Thursday. I expect those numbers to fluctuate, so I'm calling it a draw. Anyway, for the public, it's

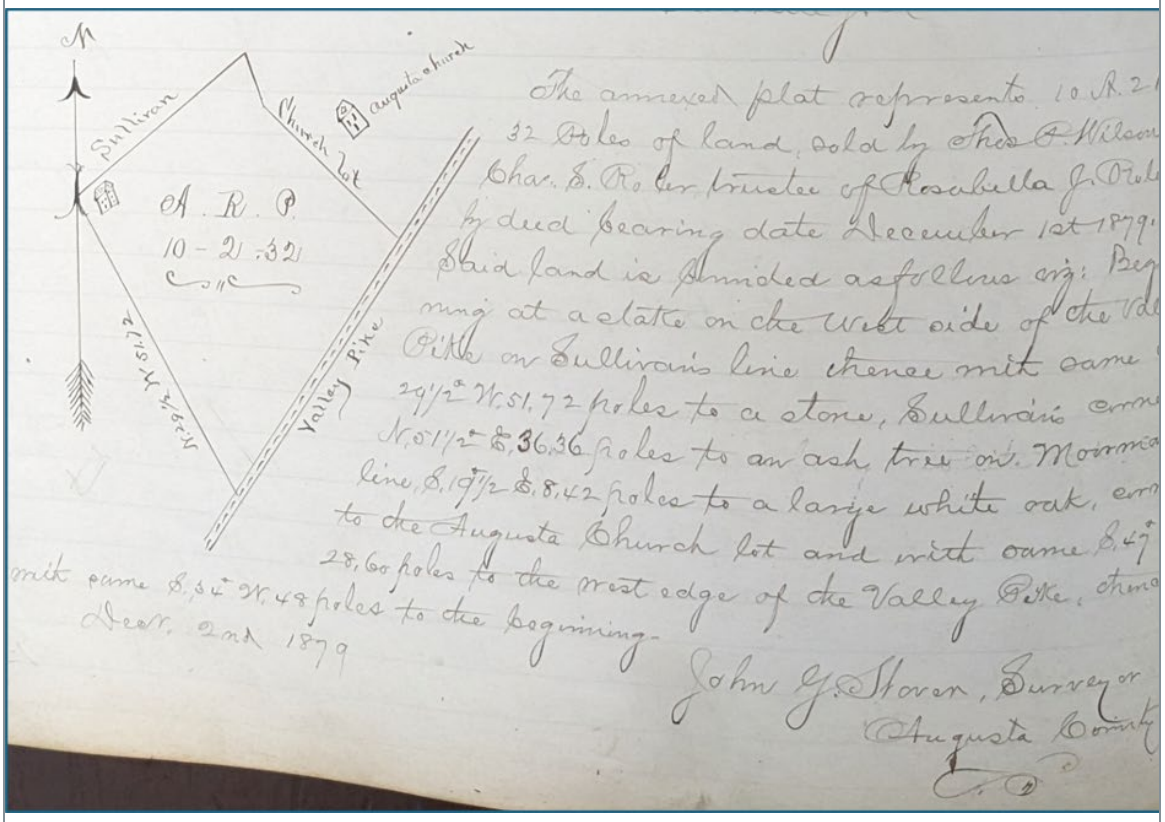
more user-friendly for us to say “open Wednesday to Sunday” than punching a hole in the middle of the week.)

My first visit to the courthouse was a Monday, March 4, solo trip just to see what I could see. I saw this:

The answers were here…somewhere. Rather stubbornly, I tried navigating the online catalog without asking for help and tried not to look lost. Fortunately, as Rich has observed, I have no poker face.

My disorientation broadcast itself all the way to the desk of Whitney Rhodes, Historic Records Assistant – a title that doesn’t begin to describe her value. Over the last month, Whitney’s been a crucial expert sleuth who’s as determined

as we are to find our answers. She spent at least an hour giving me a tutorial on the catalog, explaining the layout of the archive, and helping me locate documents. (She didn't admit until much later that Mondays are already her most demanding days.)
She got me very close to paydirt.



Don't try to read this. I strained my eyes so you don't have to. This is an entry from the Augusta County surveyor defining the boundaries of Roller's land. Here's my best effort at a transcription:

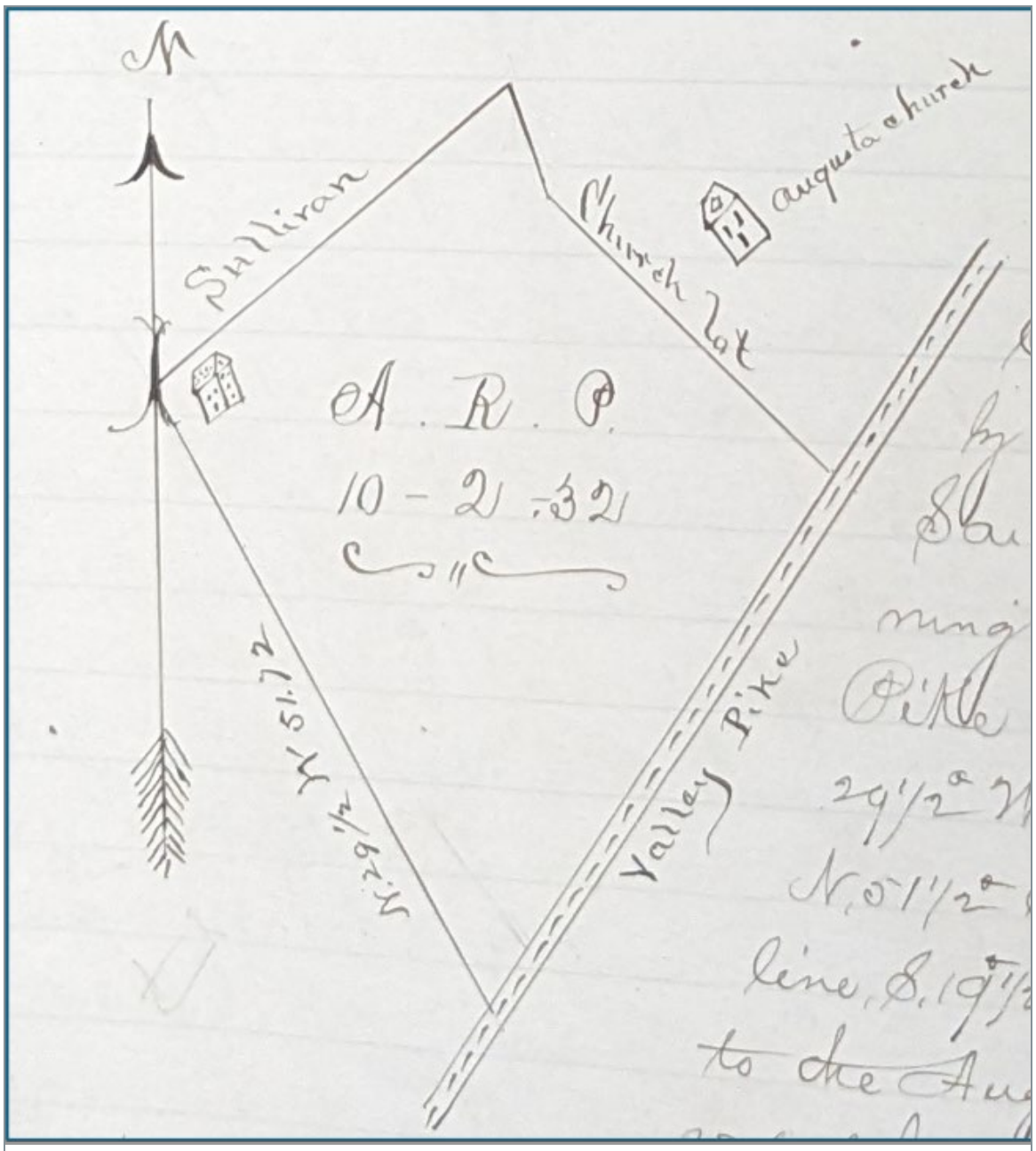
"The annexed plat represents 10A [acres], 2 R [rods], 32 Poles of land, sold by Thos. P. Wilson to Chas. S. Roler, trustee of Rosabella J. Roler, by deed bearing date December 1st 1879. Said land is limited as follows viz: Beginning at a stake on the West side of the Valley Pike on

Sullivan's line thence with same to 29 ½° W.51.72 poles to a stone, Sullivan's corner N.51 ½° E.36.36 poles to an ash tree on Moorman's line, S19 ½° E.8.42 poles to a large white oak, corner to the Augusta Church lot and with same S.47° E.28.60 poles to the west edge of the Valley Pike, thence with same S.54° W.48 poles to the beginning.
Dec 2nd
1879
John G. Shorer [sp?], Surveyor

Augusta County"

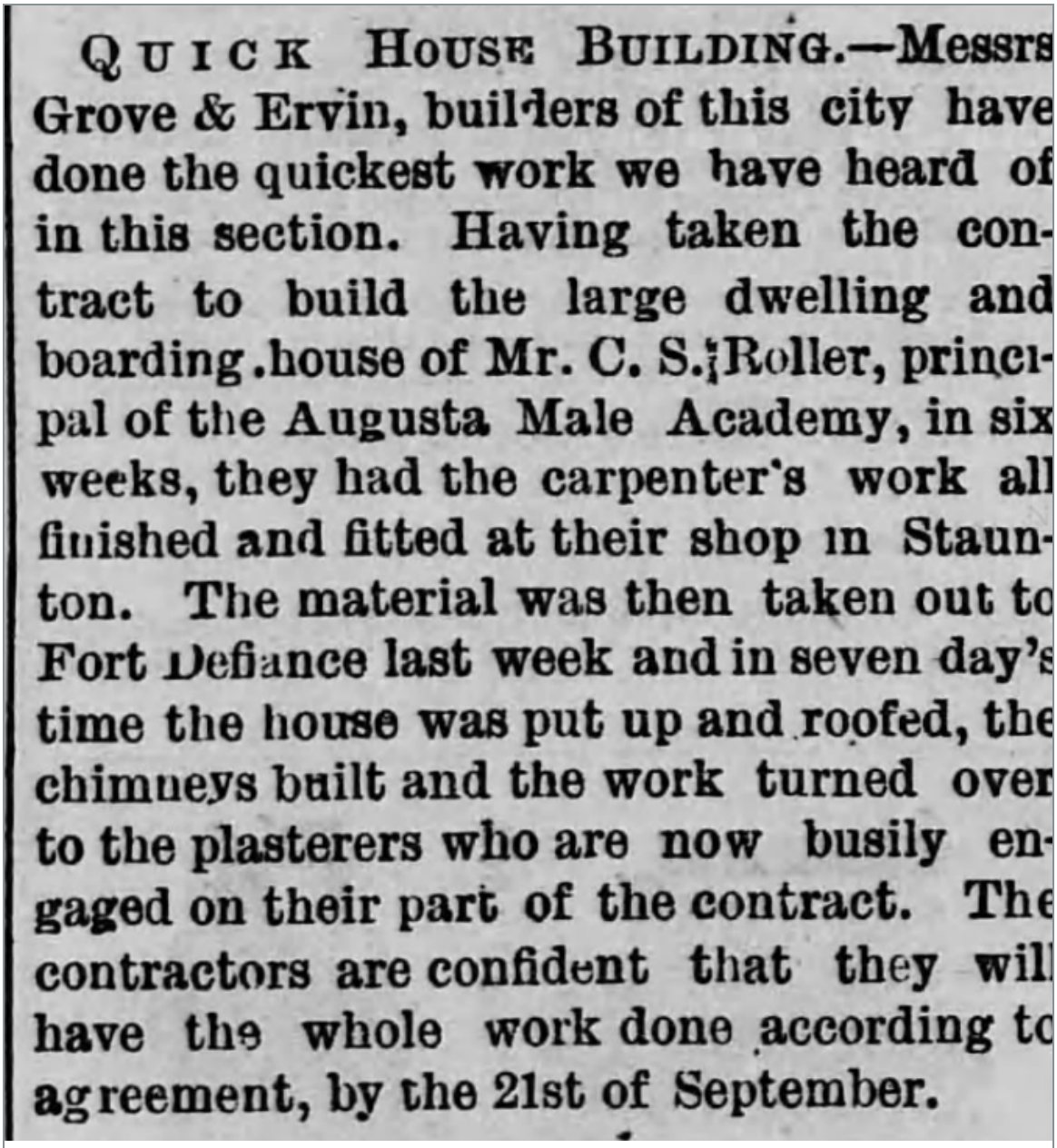
Next, she helped me find the 1881 deed that shows Roller paying $200 for 5 acres of Sullivan's land on December 19 (Book 102, p.2). Together, these primary documents confirm nearly all of May's research.

The catch is that, because History is such a tease, we now had more questions than answers. We still didn't have the '79 deed, just a reference to it written the next day. That reference, the plat annexation above, doesn't give the price. If Roller paid $75 an acre, we still didn't know how May knew that. Then there was that charming little drawing:



What's that doodle in "Sullivan's corner"? A house? Maggie Belle told Emmet Rhoades that the Roller house was **the first one** built on the property (p.26). She was only 4 when she moved in. Maybe she was too young to remember that a building was already there before her family home. But there's no trace of it. Why?

Then our other key investigator found an old newspaper clipping that put us another answer forward and 2 questions back. As recognized in last month's newsletter, Professor Roller's great-great granddaughter, Elizabeth Andrews, has volunteered dozens of hours at the museum doing long-delayed scanning of family documents and photos. Plus, from home, she's been using her paid subscription to Newspapers.com to find the earliest published references to the academy (so she's saving the museum both time and money). Elizabeth's persistence led her to this from the *Staunton Vindicator* of August 29, 1879:



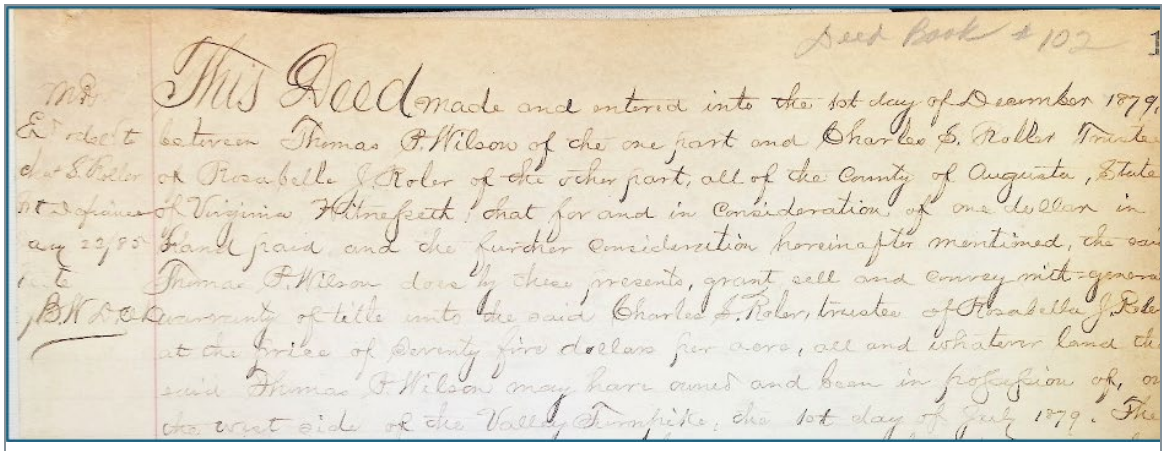
QUICK HOUSE BUILDING.—Messrs Grove & Ervin, builders of this city have done the quickest work we have heard of in this section. Having taken the contract to build the large dwelling and boarding house of Mr. C. S. Roller, principal of the Augusta Male Academy, in six weeks, they had the carpenter's work all finished and fitted at their shop in Staunton. The material was then taken out to Fort Defiance last week and in seven day's time the house was put up and roofed, the chimneys built and the work turned over to the plasterers who are now busily engaged on their part of the contract. The contractors are confident that they will have the whole work done according to agreement, by the 21st of September.

That doodle house *is* the Roller house, so how were AMA's first structures being built on land Charles Roller wouldn't own for another 13 weeks? Maybe there was a gentleman's agreement or down payment. Elizabeth had dug up a new source that forced us to reconsider what our messengers had told us.

On March 19, Elizabeth, Keeley, and I joined Whitney at the courthouse to make sense of this, which was hard on the eyes. The documents are well-preserved, and the penmanship is careful, but it's still a *slog* to read. Printing isn't fancy, but it's vastly more readable than even refined 145-year-old cursive.

We ended up trudging in circles. Among the many Roller land transactions, the indexes had none for 1879. This was despite Whitney's extraordinary commitment to our case. She'd been working with us for at least an hour, pulling out the giant deed books, straining to decipher handwriting, and trying to find our way out of the wilderness. Note that it's not Whitney's job just to sit and wait for visitors needing help. She has a whole other set of responsibilities back at her desk, but she'd left those to help us. At 3:30 though, it was time for her to go home. We stayed a little longer before packing up as well, hoping that fresh eyes on a future visit might notice new clues.

Then, with a surprise encore, Whitney broke open the case, because she had to. Maybe 5 minutes after leaving for the day, she came charging back into the records room with sudden inspiration. As much as I like dogs, comparing Whitney to "a dog with a bone" seems indecorous, but *that's what she called herself* to explain what compelled her to swoop back into our mystery instead of going home. She remembered where she'd seen our missing deed: Book 102, page 1, just one page before the 1881 document that we'd found so easily. Hiding in plain sight, it was beautiful:


Deed Book # 102 1

This Deed made and entered into the 1st day of December 1879,
between Thomas P. Wilson of the one part and Charles S. Roller Trustee
of Rosabelle J. Roler of the other part, all of the County of Augusta, State
of Virginia Witnesseth, that for and in consideration of one dollar in
hand paid and the further consideration hereinafter mentioned, the said
Thomas P. Wilson doth by these presents, grant sell and convey with general
warranty of title unto the said Charles S. Roler, trustee of Rosabelle J. Roler
at the price of seventy five dollars per acre, all and whatever land the
said Thomas P. Wilson may have owned and been in possession of, on
the west side of the Valley Turnpike, the 1st day of July 1879. The

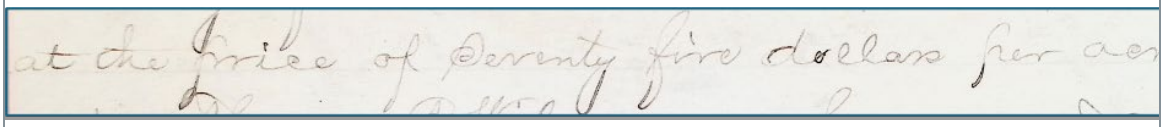
This is just a picture of the beginning. The entire deed runs 396 words but feels much longer with its twisty-straw legal prose. After reading it a couple dozen times, this is how I understand the terms:

1. On July 1, 1879, Charles made a $100 downpayment to Thomas P. Wilson.
2. On December 1, one additional dollar formalized the deed, by which Charles agreed to eventually pay $75 per acre. (The deed specifies a rate instead of a total because the land hadn't been surveyed to total its acreage. Wilson paid for the county survey the next day. Why the delay, I don't know. If you do, please write to me.)
3. For the balance, Charles would take out bonds at 6% interest to be paid off by July 2, 1880.

The deed shows that Charles didn't buy his land on December 1. He started buying it in July, which permitted him to start building his house and first barracks, which explains the doodle house and the newspaper article.

Until now, I'd been lost in the weeds, misled by confirmation bias and yet another messenger. Inexplicably, the index points to Book 102 page 1 for the paperwork of a Wilson-Roller deal from *December 4, 1884*. That wasn't the date I was looking for, so I'd never bothered to follow it. Even when I'd briefly seen the correct page, I was speed reading

to find “$75” in the first few lines. I’d failed to read down 8 lines to where “seventy five dollars” was written in faded cursive that blended it with the thicket of verbiage.

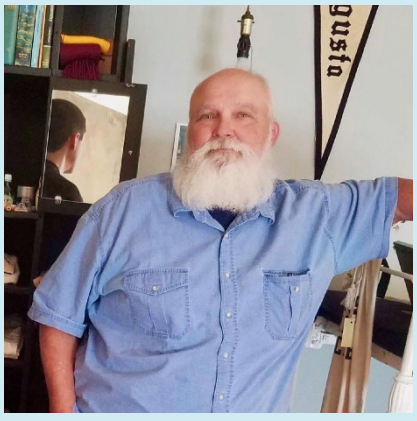


We only succeeded because Whitney was less fallible and more “dogged” than me. Our question answered, Ms. Rhodes finally allowed herself to go home. For this exemplary public servant of Augusta County, her work here was done.

The timeline finally made sense, and we’d corrected the record, because we’d gone back to the sources. Duke had been as right about December 1 as he could be from reading C.E. May. Professor May was basically right, but by omitting the July 1 downpayment from his book, he’d set us up for major confusion when we started finding sources. This matters, because when sources appear to contradict each other, you’re forced to wonder which ones could be wrong or irrelevant? It's just like if two puzzle pieces don’t fit together, one or both could be defective or foreign to the puzzle. That was the question over the article, the doodle, and the messenger. They didn’t fit until we went beyond the messenger to the deed, the missing piece that linked the rest together.

Okay, but are we just **counting rivets**? You don’t need to know Wilson, Sullivan, 12-1-79, or $75/acre. These kinds of facts tell you nothing about the life lessons that make the AMA story useful and interesting. I’m confident that whether Roller got his house in September or December had no effect on your academy experience. Right, and if this was folklore, there would be no such minutiae, because those stories are just invented vehicles for the storyteller’s

wisdom. For history, stories have to start with what actually happened, and then we see what wisdom emerges.
So what wisdom emerges from a deed? Probably none, but now we know what happened, and that's always a victory. We know when and how Professor Roller secured the land for his school, not because someone said so, but because we saw Deed Book 102 page 1 that *made it so*. That's confident knowledge, and when it comes to anything about AMA, it's the confidence I want every time I answer my late professor's question about how I know what I know. Then, I can be sure I'm staying firmly in the history business for our visitors, instead of folklore.
There's nothing original about this vision. In my Protestant Reformation class, I learned that Renaissance scholars were adopting the Latin motto ***ad fontes***, **"to the sources!**" They wanted to bypass later translators and interpreters and learn from antiquity's writers by reading their original words and deciding for themselves what they meant. That was essentially our mission for this case, and our success shows why it should remain our mission for every AMA question to come.
Thanks for reading.



vanBreemen's Expressions

April 1, 2024

Weapons at AMA (part deux)

By: Rich vanBreemen

Last month, we discussed the unearthing of a relic from the school grounds which was the first tangible evidence of the school having used muzzle loading rifles as drill weapons. There has been written evidence available for many years, but details were not included. WHY? The notion of COMMON KNOWLEDGE strikes again. When these things were in practice, EVERYONE knew about it so why document it or photograph it. It would be as common as drinking a cup of coffee in the morning and except for annoying Tiktokers, no one documents that.
Hanging on our museum wall in the SPORTS room, above the display of the early 20th century exhibit, is a Remington Rolling Block rifle

The sticker below the rifle proclaims that***: "The Remington Rolling Block rifle was carried by cadets in the early part of the 20th century."*** Well, that's good to know, but what evidence do we have that this claim is true? Normally I would start by looking

at our database. However, we have no record of how this particular weapon came to the museum. Looking through old photographs and documents of the time period is inconclusive for a couple of reasons:

1- There were very few photographs taken back then. Photography was a luxury and a time-consuming process. What photographs do exist tend to show panoramic views, hoping to capture as much of the overall experience as possible in one take. This sacrifices detail in favor of expanse.

2- Unfortunately, we have yet to discover any sort of written log detailing the day-to-day activities of the school. It would be like finding the DEAD SEA SCROLLS if something like that existed AND we could get our hands on it. Without such written evidence, we are left with anecdotal tales passed down from alum to alum or family. These are certainly interesting, but not verifiable evidence.

Enter our friends, the Detectorists. *(A detectorist is a person who regularly uses metal detectors professionally or as a hobby.)* In the vast array of items dug up on campus have been a number of spent cartridge cases. Some of these are obviously more recent and the result of ne'er-do-wells and hooligans up to their no good shenanigans, post 1984. For example, the five 7.62x39mm shells someone found after the school closed and “donated” to the museum. Interestingly, these are documented in the collection database but the Remington Rifle is not! .45 ACP shell casings found in the grass outside of the pool are most likely the result of someone’s idea of target practice rather than a school activity. However, other shell casings have been discovered that offer some evidence to the contrary. Below is an example of one of these cases. Interestingly, the several we have are all in the same condition. I will try to explain that later.

When I first saw these, I errantly identified them as 45/70 shell casings. An honest mistake given that the 45/70 was the prevalent cartridge of the US Army post Civil War up until 1896 with the introduction of the KRAG rifle and smokeless powder. The 45/70 was used in the Springfield 1873 Trapdoor rifles carried throughout the Plains Indian wars and into the Spanish American War. The ill-fated 7th Calvary of Custer fame,

was outfitted with these rifles. While the US military did indeed use the Remington rifle, it was in small quantities. The Remington Rolling Block did come chambered in the 45/70 amongst other chamberings, however documentation suggests that this was not the cartridge used by the US military with this rifle

There is no evidence of Trapdoor rifles at AMA, either written or photographic. The apparent disconnect between the rifle on the wall and the old cartridges found on campus was becoming more troublesome. This forced me to look more closely at the spent cartridges and discover my mistake. These were NOT 45/70 but actually 50/70 cartridges! Most of you are probably fighting to stay awake at this point, but hang in there. The 50/70 was replaced by the 45/70 and the remaining stocks of ammo and rifles were declared SURPLUS and sold off. The US Navy being one of the last hold outs to continue to use the rifle and cartridge. Still, none of this explains conclusively HOW this rifle ended up on our museum wall and that it is actually connected to the found cartridge cases. I will have to do a wax casting of the gun's chamber to determine its actual caliber and that will help associate this gun to these cartridges (providing it IS 50/70). But why are all of the discovered cases, seemingly shattered? This is most likely the result of the thinner part of the brass wall being eroded by the corrosive affect of burnt black powder. A good number of 30/06 cases have been unearthed as well, but they are nowhere near as eroded – the result of using non corrosive smokeless powder.

While this may seem mundane trivia to most of you, this is the kind of stuff that keeps me awake at night. I will continue to explore our archives and photographs for evidence of the Rolling Block having been used at AMA. Until then, we'll consider this in

the same vein as Schrödinger's cat - the rifle MAY or MAY NOT have been used at AMA – time will (may) tell.

Doug's Clip

A short and light hearted video clip to help us remember that sometimes a good laugh or a positive thought can make all the difference to make our and someone else's life a tad brighter.

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

SHENANDOAH VALLEY

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