

Friends of Thomas Balch Library

The CHRONICLE

Volume 23 Issue 3

Summer 2019

This Summer Discover "The Aztec News Letter" and Explore Thomas Balch Library's Rich Archives and Oral Histories

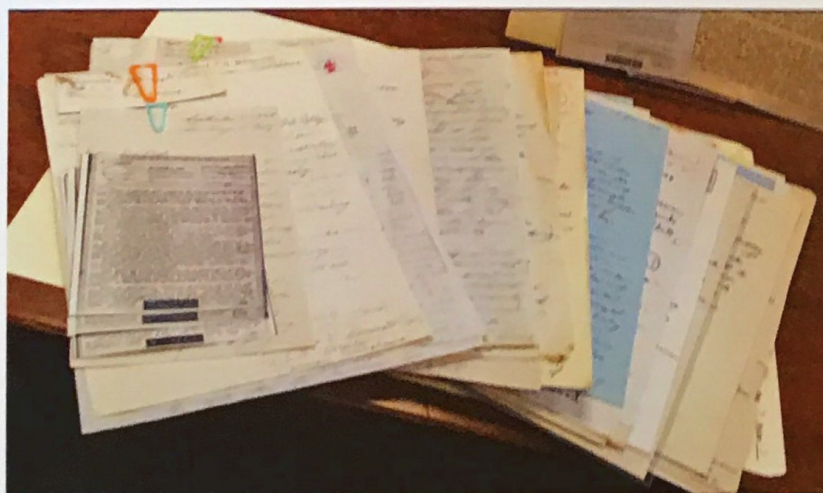


On Wednesday, July 10, Thomas Balch Library will feature a lecture by Lisa Shapiro, associate professor at Mesa College, on her new book *No Forgotten Fronts: From Classrooms to Combat*. Her research is based on a vast collection of World War II letters from servicemen who gave up their college days at then-San Diego State College to fight in places like Pearl Harbor, North Africa, and Normandy.



As the war progressed, the "Aztecs"—the students' adopted name—were soon scattered all over the globe, disconnected and separated from their college, their friends, their loved ones, and their former lives. In the spring of 1942, Dr. Lauren Post, San Diego State professor of geography and a veteran of World War I, decided to try a "news service experiment" intended to provide information about the current and former Aztecs. He encouraged the servicemen and women to write to him and, in turn, he would share their letters with their fellow Aztecs. He often passed the information on to frantic families hoping for news of their loved ones.

Professor Shapiro began her research into the collection of letters with the aim of better understanding her community college students (continued on page 3)



*Clockwise from top: Dr. Lauren Post, who promised that no San Diego State "Aztec" would be forgotten, displayed pictures of students in service, with gold stars next to the names of those who had been killed; Mesa College associate professor Lisa K. Shapiro, letters researcher and author of *No Forgotten Fronts: From Classrooms to Combat*; letters from the officially named World War II San Diego State College Servicemen's Correspondence Collection, 1941-1946, which is accessible online at <http://digital.sdsu.edu/view-item?i=271454&WINID=1559580571132>. Click on link on search engine list.*

September 29: Save the Date for Selma, Site of Friends Annual Event—page 3

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**Longtime Thomas Balch Library Assistant Mary Bettis
Fishback Passes Away on May 22, 2019**



Mary Fishback

The staff and Friends of Thomas Balch Library are deeply saddened to report the passing of Mary Bettis Fishback on May 22, 2019, from complications related to a sudden short illness. Mary started working for the library in 1996 as a part-time genealogy instructor before she became a full-time library assistant in November 2000.

Mary helped thousands of researchers and library visitors discover local and family history. Her dedication to the library and passion for sharing history and genealogy were inspiring. Her kindness made the library a warm and welcoming place to all who worked with her. She will be greatly missed.

The Aztec News Letter, from page 1

many of whom were veterans. "Once I started reading the letters," she said, "I couldn't stop."

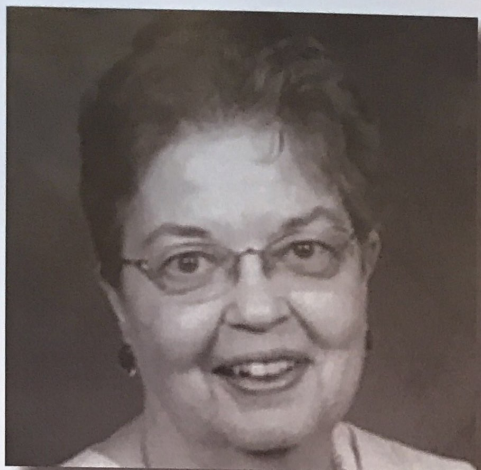
Shapiro is believed to be the only person since Lauren Post to have touched and completely read each of the 4,848 individual letters, the vast majority of them handwritten. Although she could never have begun to cover all of the individuals and their letters in her book's 25 chapters and 380 pages, she has managed to include germane and poignant passages that convey the war's impact on its committed young combatants.

"I always say it would have been enough if he [Post] had just had people write to him and if he had just written back," Shapiro observed. "But the fact that he did this newsletter for the duration of the war and let students know what all of their friends were doing and that he did it every single month—that's the thing that sort of staggers the imagination." By the end of the war, he had produced 48 issues, and circulation had reached 3,000.

The original letters in the collection are arranged chronologically by year, then alphabetically within folders according to the last name of the author. The newsletter is available online by year: 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, and 1946. A full run is also available along with a World War II servicemen's guest book. Between 1943 and 1945, the guest book was kept in the campus cafeteria so returning servicemen could sign the book and write messages about their experiences.

To access the full archive, visit the World War II San Diego State College Servicemen's Correspondence Collection, 1941-1946, which is accessible online at <http://digital.sdsu.edu/view-item?i=271454&WINID=1559580571132>. Click the link on your search engine's list.

Remembering Mary Alice Windle Wertz: Educator, Genealogist, and Loudoun History Award Recipient



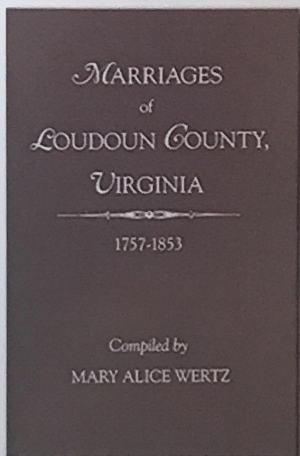
A longtime resident of Loudoun County, local educator, historian, and activist Mary Alice Wertz passed away March 21, 2019.

Mary Alice was a graduate of Lincoln High School and earned a degree in history from William & Mary. She was passionate first about her family. History and genealogy came in a close second.

Her daughter remembers family picnics often spent in graveyards doing research. Mary Alice authored a number of genealogy books, including the "Marriages of Loudoun County, Virginia, 1757-1853," and was an expert in local family histories. In 1989, the Loudoun Library Foundation named her one of the County's "special resources," and in 1999, the Thomas Balch Library Advisory Commission bestowed on her a Loudoun History Award for significant contributions to preserving Loudoun's past.

Mary Alice was a long-active member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, KETOCTIN Chapter, the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution as well as a strong supporter of Thomas Balch Library and the Friends. We all miss her ready laughter, sense of detail, and dedication to history and genealogy.

—Susan Webber



The History of Selma Mansion, Site of the Friends' Annual Event Set for Sunday, September 29



Sharon Virts and Scott Miller, the new owners of Loudoun's legendary Selma Mansion, are graciously opening their home to the Friends for our annual event on Sunday, September 29, from 4 to 7 PM. In our next issue of the *Chronicle*, we'll learn about their extraordinary restoration of the property, which is located five miles north of Morven Park off Route 15.

The original mansion was built between 1807 and 1812 for Armistead Thomson Mason (1787-1819). In 1891 Thomas Swann III (1864-1896)—the grandson of Thomas Swann, Sr. (1809-1883), who had served as mayor of Baltimore, governor of Maryland, and the United States representative for Maryland's 3rd Congressional District, then the 4th Congressional District—purchased the property from the Beverley family.

In January 1897, Elijah B. White (1864-1926), son of Confederate Colonel Elijah V. White (1832-1907), commander of Company A Virginia 35th Cavalry Battalion, known as Whites Rebels and Whites Comanches, purchased Selma, even though the original house had been severely damaged by fire. He commissioned the architecture firm of Noland and Baskervill of Richmond, Virginia, to design his 1902 home (see a 1906 view above right), which incorporated some of the structure that survived the fire. The Norris Brothers of Leesburg were given the task of building the house. For a sneak preview of the present-day restoration, visit the Selma Mansion website at <https://selmamansionrebirth.com/gallery>

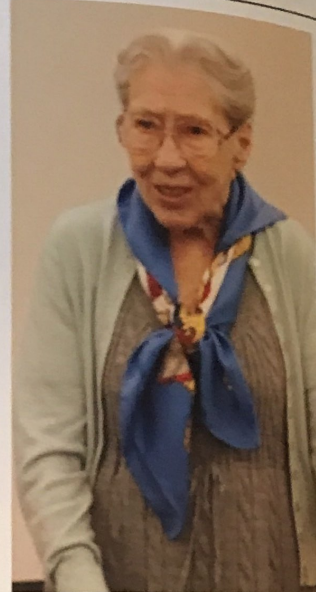
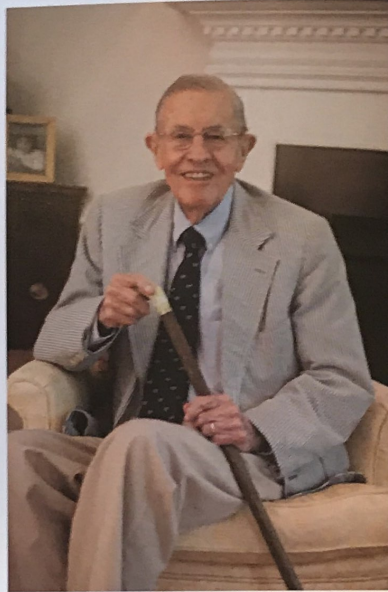
—Donald G. Cooper

Catch Up with Friends' Video Histories This Summer

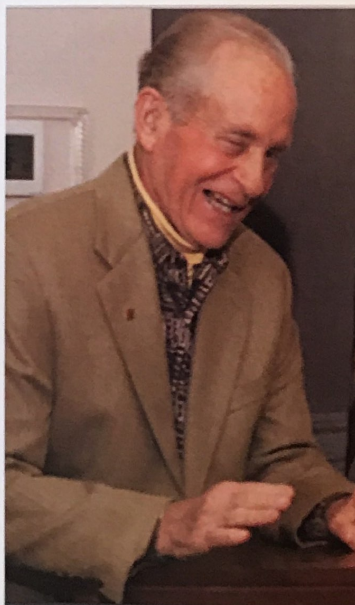
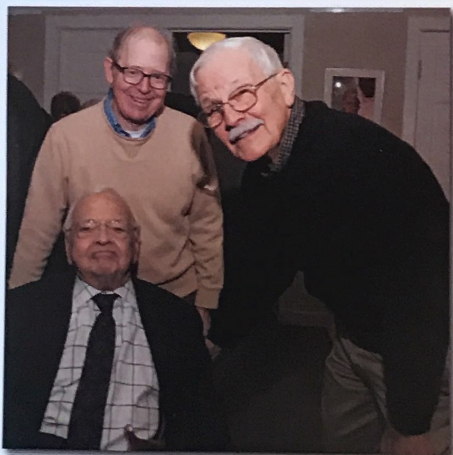
Five years ago Friends of Thomas Balch Library made a commitment to capture the personal histories of influential citizens who, through their careers and contributions to the community, have improved life in Loudoun County.

To date, the Friends have completed and added the videos of five individuals to the Library's oral history archives: Teckla Cox, a groundbreaking Loudoun County planner; Bill Harrison, farmer and Virginia Extension agent; James Lucier, writer, genealogist, and historian; the renowned photographer Howard Allen, and Lou Etta Watkins, the dynamic leader of the Loudoun County Branch of the NAACP. She has advocated for the inclusion of Loudoun's African American history in the schools and that it be housed in a world-class facility accessible to all—Thomas Balch Library.

At the library you also can listen to a series of interviews in the Student Oral History Collection that were conducted in the spring of 1981. Those interviews are concerned with many aspects of life in Loudoun County.



Middleburg photographer Howard Allen, above left, enjoyed unparalleled access to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy and her children when they visited their Middleburg home, Glen Ora. As an influential Loudoun County planner, Teckla Cox, above right, was instrumental in shaping the county's buildable landscape and preserving its historical areas. Allen passed away in 2015 and Cox in 2017.



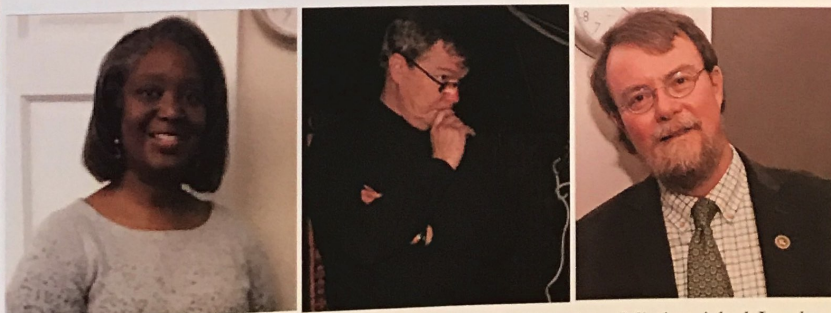
At left, historian and video subject James Lucier sits with historian Wynne Saffer, behind Lucier, and Jim Hershman, chairman of the Thomas Balch Library Advisory Commission. Above center, Virginia Extension agent and Loudoun County agriculture leader Bill Harrison is a founder of the Loudoun Heritage Farm Museum, which includes a Waxpool general store that was moved lock, stock, and barrel to the museum. Above right, Lou Etta Watkins, shown here with her daughter Julie Lane, has led the Loudoun County Branch of the NAACP and the PTA of the George Washington Carver Elementary School in Purcellville. She also has served the community as a member of both the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and the League of Women Voters

Library Hosts German Genealogy Seminar



On May 22, Thomas Balch Library welcomed genealogist and author James M. Beidler for a daylong seminar that helped participants unlock information about their German ancestors. The workshop contrasted the German migrations of the 18th century with those of the 19th century, zigzagged through German church records, and explained the Palatines. Beidler is joined above by Don Cooper, Friends president, and Alexandra Gressitt, library director.

Friends Who Makes Our Video Histories Possible



These Friends have played key roles in capturing the histories of distinguished Loudoun leaders. At far left, clockwise from top, Drew Babb, director; Patty Rogers-Renner, producer; the late Howard Allen, interviewee; and Sarah Huntington, videographer. Above, left to right: Donna Bohanon, Black History Committee chair, who interviewed Lou Etta Watkins; Peter Buck, video editor; and Rich Gillespie, historian, who talked with Teckla Cox, Bill Harrison, and James Lucier.

Visit the Library and Explore the Special Collections

Thomas Balch Library's special collections include a wide variety of rare and unique materials, including original manuscripts and archives, book indices, census and cemetery records, deeds and wills, historic house files, maps, and more.

Archives and Manuscripts: Loudoun County records, personal papers, and business, club, and local organizations' records are available. Collection materials include correspondence, diaries, account books, minutes, and ordinances. Collection guides are available.

Book Indices: Some popular books in the collection of Thomas Balch Library were published or produced without indices or tables of contents, limiting their usefulness. Staff and volunteers have created indices of select items to facilitate research.

Cemetery Records: This online index of more than 200 local cemeteries includes files filled with photographs of tombstones. <https://www.leesburgva.gov/government/departments/thomas-balch-library/loudoun-county-cemetery-database>.

Census Records: Federal census returns available on microfilm include Loudoun County, 1810-1930; all Virginia counties, 1810-1930; and selected adjacent Maryland counties. Online access to all U.S. census records is available on-site.

Deeds and Wills: Indices and microfilm of documents for most years up to 1904 are available. More recent years are at the Loudoun County courthouse.

Genealogies and Family Files: These books and collections emphasize Loudoun County. Online resources provide access to national and international genealogical information.

Historic House Archives— Lewis/Edwards Architectural Surveys provide information about historic sites and buildings in Loudoun County.

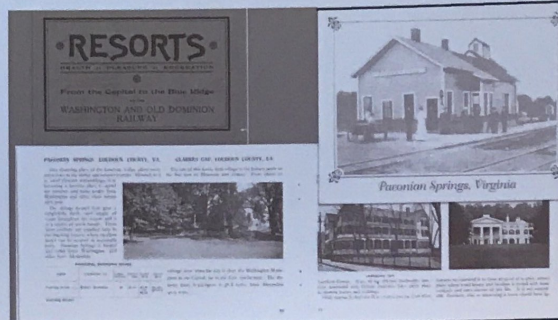
- Leesburg Architectural Surveys include survey files of Leesburg's historic and old districts.

- African American Architectural Surveys of Loudoun County from the Black History Committee of Friends of Thomas Balch Library, Inc., and County of Loudoun, Department of Planning, Leesburg.

- Table of Contents and Indices to Exploring Leesburg. *Exploring Leesburg* was published in 2003 by the Town of Leesburg.

Address Index and Name Index were created by Thomas Balch Library volunteers and staff.

Digital Exhibits



The staff of Thomas Balch Library is creating digital exhibits to showcase some of the library's collections, including "Railroading in Loudoun County."

Perhaps you are familiar with the W&OD trail and may have walked or biked it. But are you familiar with the history of the railroad that the trail follows? The collection's photographs and documents tell that history and show how local residents interacted with the railroad. You may also recognize some familiar landmarks from the trail along the way. The Paeonian Springs station is shown above.

Visit the library to view these items in person and learn more about Loudoun County's railroading history.

Maps: Historical and current maps of Loudoun County, its towns, and nearby counties. On-site access to database index of holdings and to the digital Virginia Sanborn Maps. An index is available.

Microforms: Church records, Loudoun County and Town minutes and ordinances, manuscripts and monographs, newspapers, Virginia census and Vital Records. An index is available.

Military Collection: Print and archival information about the Colonial period, American Revolution, War of 1812, American Civil War, World Wars I and II.

Newspapers: Visit the Thomas Balch Library's Special Collections section to access the link to a list of the Loudoun County newspapers (*continued on page 7*)



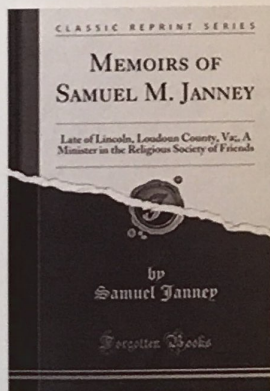
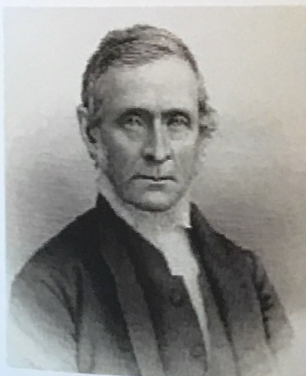
(from page 6)
accessible on microfilm. Here you also can access an index of names appearing in historic newspapers.

Oral Histories:

From the 1970s to the present, many of these oral

histories have been sponsored by the Black History Committee documenting African American experiences in Loudoun County, including those of Charles P. Clark, John Divine, and J. Dabney Simpson. An index of interviewees and a guide for the Student Oral History Collection are available.

Rare Books: Publications by historical figures in Loudoun County, such as Margaret Mercer (*Popular Lectures on Ethics; Or, Moral Obligation; For the Use of Schools*), Samuel Mcpherson Janney (*Memoirs Of Samuel M. Janney, Late Of Lincoln, Loudoun County, Va., A Minister In The Religious Society Of Friends*), William Wirt (*The Letters Of The British Spy*) and Thomas Balch (*International Courts Of Arbitration*).



Among the library's collection of rare books is the *Memoirs of Samuel M. Janney*, above.

Tax Rolls for Loudoun County: Tithables 1758-1786, Personal Property 1782-1850, and Land Tax Rolls 1782-1870 are available on microfilm.

Vertical Files: Biographical, Church, and Historical: Articles, clippings, and photographs about Loudoun County residents, local congregations, and local history. Vertical files are divided into three specific sections: *Ephemera*, *Unpublished Papers*, and *Vertical Files*.

Visual Collections: Include over 10,000 indexed

images dating from late 1800s to the present, illustrating local history. Collection highlights include works of Loudoun County photographers Russell Gregg (1930s-1940s), Winslow Williams (1940s and 1950s), Lewis-Edwards Architectural Surveys photographs (1970s), and Historic Postcards. More than 6,000 images are available digitally on-site.



Above left, a Loudoun Times-Mirror newspaper from times past; above, a historic postcard.

Library Services and References

Earphones: The Library makes disposable earphones available free of charge. You may purchase a pair for \$1 and reuse them on later visits or bring your own.

Internet: The Library has a wireless internet access (WI-FI). There is a one-hour time limit on computer use. Self-service printing is available at 25 cents a page.

Interlibrary Loan is available to Loudoun residents with a valid Thomas Balch Library or Loudoun County Public Library card. There is a \$5 fee per request, limit to 5 requests at one time.

Research: Although Thomas Balch Library is unable to do extensive research for patrons, we are happy to provide 15 minutes of free general research for patrons unable to visit the library in person (including queries received via phone, email, mail, or in person if the request is left for staff research). Limit three requests per month. Patrons will not be charged for reference services provided in the library.

Thomas Balch Library Meeting Room

This room is available to the public on a fee basis: \$10 per hour for non-profits and \$20 per hour for for-profits. No admission may be charged, no donation or tuition may be required or solicited, and no products or services may be sold. To check on availability, please call (703) 737-7195.



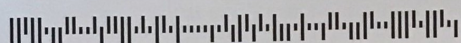
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Summer 2019 Programs & Exhibits

Digital History—10 AM - Noon, Thursday, June 6 – Laura E. Christiansen, curator of Manuscripts and Archives, and Stephanie Seal, library associate, introduce the digital side of historical research, including how to create visualizations, use GIS-based mapping tools, and the benefits of crowdsourcing.

No Forgotten Fronts: From Classrooms to Combat—Lisa K. Shapiro –7 - 9 PM, Wednesday, July 10

Researching African American Genealogy—10 AM - Noon, Thursday, August 11— Under the direction of Lori Kimball, learn how to conduct historical or genealogical research using the resources available at Thomas Balch Library and Loudoun County Courthouse. Kimball is a member of the Black History Committee of the Friends of Thomas Balch Library and co-researcher of the *Enslaved Community of President James Monroe*. Kimball is a recipient of the Thomas Balch Library's Loudoun History Award.

Margaret Mercer Room Exhibits

Loudoun County Civil War Artifacts — June 1 – July 31

Marshalls at Home: Leesburg Life of George and Katherine Marshall — August 1 – 31

The Elegant Muse Presents Up-Cycled Jewelry —September 1– 30

Lower Level Meeting Room Exhibits

Seascapes, Landscapes, and Still Life — through June 30

Art Exhibit by Jim Hanna— July 1 – September 30

Programs are held in the downstairs meeting room and are free unless otherwise noted. For updates on programs, tours, and exhibits, please visit the Friends' website at balchfriends.org or the Library's website at <http://www.leesburgva.gov/government/departments/thomas-balch-library/library-events>