



# BALCH COLUMN

Thomas Balch Library ■ 208 W. Market Street ■ Leesburg, Virginia 20176  
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## News FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Since the last issue of the Balch Column many changes have taken place. It would seem we are living in a new world for which the symphony has not yet been written. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been felt by staff, volunteers, and patrons alike with the cancellation of events and the transfer of others to virtual platforms; temporary closure of the library and now research and visiting exhibits by appointment only. We were closed to the public from March 16-June 3. Since June 3 we have been providing access for research and to view exhibits by appointment on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Classes, albeit on a virtual platform, resumed in August.

Registration is mandatory for our classes scheduled through at least December – without registration you will not have access to the necessary links to participate in the class.

All our procedures for accessing the library, including registration and virtual reference may be found on our website. Staff has created a short video, "Wallace the Bear Researches at Thomas Balch Library," currently featured on Facebook and soon to be posted to the website, to assist you in understanding the process for scheduling an appointment.



If you have not already, please check out our newly revised and updated website. You will also find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Since our closure, two staff members accepted full time employment. Tahari Van Johnson accepted a position with the Massachusetts Trial Court Library system and Kelly Arford-Horne accepted a position as an archeologist with the Germanna Foundation in Virginia. While Tahari has moved out of the area and will no longer be with us, Kelly, we are pleased to say, will be staying on with the Library, though only with occasional hours. It is also my pleasure to note that a former employee, Stephanie Seal Walters, now working at the University of Southern Mississippi, defended her dissertation in August and is a newly minted PhD in History.

Either in person or virtually, we hope to be able to have her present on her research in the near future.

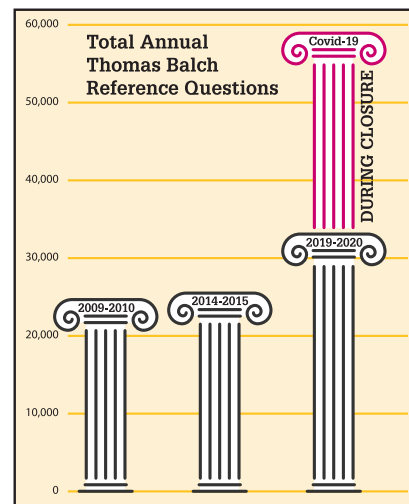
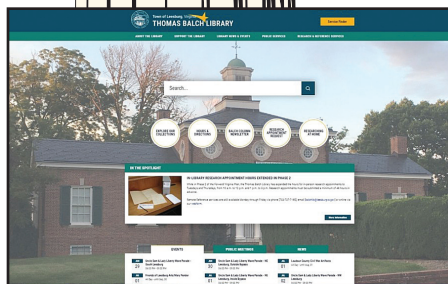
A new staff member joined the Library as a Library Genealogy Associate in March just as the pandemic hit. Norah Schneider has a BA in History from DePauw University, a MA in American and European History from Providence College, a PhD in Humanities from Salve Regina University, and a Certificate in Genealogical Research from Boston University. She previously worked at the United States Naval War College and Falmouth Historical Society. Her research interests include genealogical research methodology, immigration and naturalization research, Jewish genealogy, and disaster history. Many of you have already interacted with Norah virtually and we hope you will welcome her once we reopen the doors in more normal times.

Although we are uncertain when we will be able to resume in-person events, be assured we are working hard to prepare for these in the Spring, should that be possible. Plans are also being made to host our fifth annual Genealogical Seminar in May, if possible.

I have always said that the library is a destination for local residents and visitors from across the country and around the globe and that it is a gathering place for local historians, genealogists, and researchers. During the last seven months, as we have opened our virtual doors to research, we have been rewarded with an overwhelming response and interest in researching here at the library. As Laura Christiansen and I can attest, we have served as many people virtually as we would have normally served in person. We thank you for your ongoing interest in and support of the Library's mission. It is immensely rewarding to have our efforts so profoundly reinforced and supported.

We at the library look forward to welcoming you when once again we can all visit the Library or attend programs and exhibits in person.

Alexandra S. Gressitt,  
Library Director



# Some Activities DURING THE PANDEMIC INCLUDE:



**SHELF-READING AND CLEANING OF STACKS** was completed by Bryan Fisher—a mammoth task.

## NORAH SCHNEIDER

presented our first class, virtually, on Genealogy Research Techniques following COVID-19 cancellations and has assisted with moving classes to a virtual platform.



## COLLECTION PROCESSING

Following the departure of Stephanie Seal Walters, Maria Christina Mairena is now completing processing of the Elaine Thompson Collection. The donation to Thomas Balch Library of educator and historian Elaine E. Thompson's (1932 – 2016) personal and research papers has yielded three discrete collections. The first collection, The Loudoun County Emancipation Association (LCEA) Collection, 1896 to 2015 (M0145) contains records of the association, with the bulk of the material covering from 1896 to 1971. The records comprise minutes, speeches, membership lists, biographical, genealogical, and census information about LCEA members, newspaper articles, and financial reports. The LCEA documents also include research for Elaine Thompson's book, *In the Watchfires, The Loudoun County Emancipation Association, 1890-1971*. The second collection, Death and Remembrance Materials, Loudoun County, VA and Vicinity, 1900–2015 (M0146) contains obituaries, funeral programs, photos (living and dead), and memorial service programs, primarily of African–American residents of Loudoun County. The third collection, which is currently being processed, is the Elaine E. Thompson Papers. The Papers are the largest collection of the three, containing research and notes on Loudoun County Colored Schools and Douglass High School; local and regional Black history including local historically Black

churches; research for a variety of history articles, speeches, and exhibits; along with family photos, letters, and genealogical research on the Thompson family. These three collections are outstanding additions to the Rust Archive. They add to our knowledge of Loudoun County African–American history: their fraternal organizations, celebrations, hard work done to provide higher education, and familial information, which will be of use to genealogical researchers and historians.

## ALEXANDRA S. GRESSITT

is nearing completion of processing the Mott-Bentley Correspondence 1835-1900 and n.d. (bulk 1835-1865). The Correspondence, digitized by a graduate student, Shannon Combs-Bennet, has now been sorted and foldered with many letters sleeved. This collection contains approximately 505 letters and related materials detailing Leesburg and Loudoun County Virginia life, customs, education, families, and experiences primarily before and during the American Civil War. The collection demonstrates the fluidity of society during formative years of the United States with correspondence ranging from South Carolina, Pennsylvania, New York, and westward to Kentucky, and documenting duels, education, commentary on enslaved peoples, and the home front during war time. The collection provides greater insight into the lives of women in the nineteenth century than of Mott's medical practice, but compliments Mott materials in the Ethel Littlejohn Adams Collection (M091).

## VOLUNTEER FROM HOME OPPORTUNITY

Thomas Balch Library is launching new online opportunities to volunteer! Over the summer, volunteers helped to test and improve a pilot online transcription website set-up. Their help with two activities – transcribing a deed and indexing pages from a really interesting ledger/scrapbook that was once kept in the Jail at the Court House in Leesburg – helped us develop a new website that will launch soon. Are you interested in helping us transcribe and index documents, identify photographs, and other fun projects from the comfort of your own home? Email Laura Christiansen (lchristiansen@leesburgva.gov) to sign up.

## EXHIBITS 2020-21

### MARGARET MERCER ROOM October 2020

Black History Committee/Alicia Cohen - History of the African-American Vote

### November 2020

Laura Christiansen - Selections from Collections in the Rust Archive

### December 2020

Charles Johnston—Granny's Cooking: Meals at 21 West Loudoun St., 1950s-1970s

### January 2021

Loudoun Heritage Farm Museum

### February 2021

Black History Committee - The Black Family: Representation, Identity and Diversity

### March 2021

Beth Wilson - The Barefoot Weaver

### April 2021

Gallivanting Around the World: Trinkets and Souvenirs from the Morven Park Collection

### May 2021

Loudoun Preservation Society Retrospective

### June 2021

Leesburg Garden Club

### July-August 2021

John Creamer - Loudoun County Civil War Artifacts

### September 2021

Loudoun County Clerk of the Circuit Court, Historic Records Department

### October 2021

Jeff Thomas - 1781 Siege of Yorktown: The 240th Anniversary

### November 2021

Laura Christiansen - Selections from the Collections in the Rust Archives

### December 2021

Virginia Piedmont Heritage Area Association

### LOWER LEVEL MEETING ROOM July-September 2020

Mike and Anne Marie Chirieleison (FOLPA) - The Lens and the Brush - A Thousand Forests

### October-December 2020

Bethany Widom - A Step in Time

### January-March 2021

Friends of Leesburg Arts (FOLPA)

### April-June 2021

Loudoun Photography Club

### July-September 2021

Loudoun Sketch Club

### October-December 2021

Jim Hanna - Photography



# THOMAS BALCH LIBRARY

## 2020-21 Classes

### RESEARCHING HISTORY AND GENEALOGY AT THOMAS BALCH LIBRARY

#### IDENTIFICATION AND CARE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

**Thursday, 1 October 2020, 10AM**

Laura E. Christiansen, Curator of Manuscripts and Archives, will guide participants through a practical approach to the identification and preservation of photographs from the daguerreotype to the inkjet print. The workshop will include an overview of the history and technology of photographic materials, identification and dating techniques, and best practices to care for and preserve your photograph collections.

#### PRESERVATION FOR HOME ARCHIVES

**Thursday, 5 November 2020, 10AM**

Gabrielle Sanchez, Contract Archivist and former Library Reference Associate at Thomas Balch Library, will introduce participants to the basics of preservation and discuss the best ways to house and protect personal archives. Topics will include proper ways to handle letters, books, photographs, and other media; common conservation needs; threats to paper and electronic media; and the dangers of non-archival storage products.

#### INTERVIEWS AND FAMILY HISTORY

**Thursday, 3 December 2020, 10AM**

Norah Schneider, Library Genealogy Associate at the Thomas Balch Library, will guide participants through the essentials to conduct a successful interview for your family history research. Learn how to prepare for an interview, questions to ask, and different ways to preserve interviews.

#### CARE AND PRESERVATION OF TEXTILES

**Thursday, 4 February 2021, 10AM**

MC Mairena, Senior Library Associate, Thomas Balch Library. Do you have old family dresses, uniforms, quilts, or baby clothes, and you're unsure how to take care of them? Join us for a workshop to go over basic techniques for caring and storing your family textile heirlooms.

#### WRITING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

**Thursday, 4 March 2021, 10AM**

Writing your family history is a great way to preserve your research and share what you've found with your family members. Norah Schneider, Library Genealogy Associate at the Thomas Balch Library, will go over the different parts to writing your family history and answer your questions on the writing process.

#### RESEARCHING USING COURT RECORDS

**Thursday, 1 April 2021, 10AM**

Jeanette Irby, Loudoun County Circuit Court Judge and former Leesburg Town Attorney will discuss how to use court records and other resources for data that are frequently overlooked in genealogical and historical research. Irby will demonstrate how to mine court records for clues that can be used to collect information for genealogical research. Examples of these records include real estate records, chancery suits, estates, and indexes. Jeanette Irby has researched land records dating from the 1700s and participated in genealogical seminars sponsored by the Warrenton Court House Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution of which she is past Regent. Irby currently serves as secretary of District VI of the Virginia DAR Chapters. She holds a BS from Central Michigan University and a JD from Thomas Cooley Law School in Lansing, MI.

#### HISTORIC PRESERVATION

**Thursday, 6 May 2021, 10AM**

In celebration of National Preservation Month – Historic Preservation in Leesburg and Loudoun County: Panel Discussion with Lauren Murphy, Preservation Planner, Town of Leesburg, Heidi Siebentritt, Loudoun County Preservation Planner, and Steve Thompson, Loudoun County Archaeologist.

#### DIGITAL HISTORY

**Thursday, 3 June 2021, 10AM**

What new digital tools are available to help access and understand historic documents and data? Senior Library Associate, Joanna C. Lee, will introduce the digital side of historical research, including how to create basic visualizations, use GIS-based mapping tools, and the benefits of crowdsourcing. Whether you are a "digital native" or technology-wary, this workshop will explore different digital humanities' methodologies that are accessible and friendly to all users. Come and learn how to get started with digital history.

#### GENEALOGY RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

**Thursday, 5 August 2021, 10AM**

In this course, Norah Schneider, Library Genealogy Associate at the Thomas Balch Library, will cover intermediate genealogy research techniques. The course will move past basic genealogical research and explore research methods, record types, and genealogical sources for those who have already started researching their family history.

### *We're Gone Virtual*

Due to the on-going pandemic, Thomas Balch library has moved its Thursday morning classes to a virtual platform. Pre-registration for all classes and exhibits is required: <https://tinyurl.com/TBLEvents>

To view exhibits and request a research appointment, please complete the research appointment request form: <https://tinyurl.com/TBLAppointment>

All Sunday Lectures, Tours, and Seminars have been cancelled and the meeting room is unavailable for use through December 2020.



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Due to COVID-19 precautions, the library is open by appointment only until further notice. For more information see our Appointment Request Form. Please contact us before travelling to the library. Appointments are currently available during the following hours:  
TUESDAY 10 AM – 12 PM , 1 PM – 3 PM  
THURSDAY 10 AM – 12 PM , 1 PM – 3 PM

## Other Activities AT THOMAS BALCH LIBRARY

**THOMAS BALCH LIBRARY ADVISORY COMMISSION** sponsors the annual Loudoun History Awards. It meets at the library the second Wednesday of each month at 7PM. The public is always welcome.

The Loudoun History Awards have been suspended in 2020 due to COVID-19 to be resumed when social distancing requirements are lifted.

**THOMAS BALCH LIBRARY ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION** a 501c3 established in 2015 to receive, maintain, and administer assets in perpetuity to support programs and outreach services of the Thomas Balch Library.

Support this year includes replacement of the archives HVAC unit for the Rust Archives and a garden bench in memory of Mary Fishback.

**FRIENDS OF THE THOMAS BALCH LIBRARY, INC.**, a 501c3 organized to provide support for Thomas Balch Library, meets at the library every other month, sponsors an annual fundraiser, and publishes a quarterly newsletter *The Chronicle*. For more information, visit [www.balchfriends.org](http://www.balchfriends.org) or call 540/579-2825.

For more than a decade it has been the pleasure of Friends of the Thomas Balch Library to host an annual fundraiser. While this event is important for us financially it is also our opportunity to thank our donors, invite new supporters into our fold, and share stories, spaces and speakers that interest us and that we hope interest you as well. Unfortunately this year Covid-19 will deprive us of this special time with our supporters. While the absence of this event is keenly felt, our work on behalf of the library continues. Maintaining Thomas Balch Library and growing its collection is an ongoing endeavor

that we seek, even in these unprecedented times, to support. In this vein several former sponsors have indicated that they would like to contribute again this year. If you are interested, please send your donations to: Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, P O Box 2184, Leesburg, VA 20177. We thank you for your prior support and hope we can all meet in 2021 with an in-person event once again.

**BLACK HISTORY COMMITTEE** of Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Inc., meets at the library the first Saturday of every month at 10AM. The public is always welcome. For more information, visit [www.balchfriends.org](http://www.balchfriends.org) or call 540/579-2825.

**LOUDOUN COUNTY CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE** meets the second Tuesday of each month at 7:30PM except January and February. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in Loudoun County's history during the American Civil War. Guests are welcome to attend two meetings without charge. Annual family dues are \$25. Meetings are held at Thomas Balch Library unless otherwise noted. For further information and to confirm meetings during the pandemic visit: <http://lccwrt.wordpress.com>

**THE VIRGINIA FORUM** will hold its fifteenth annual conference March 25-27 2021, focused on Crafting History, at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond. The Virginia Forum, an interdisciplinary conference, offers an opportunity for scholars, teachers, writers, museum curators, historic site interpreters, archivists, librarians, and all those interested in Virginia history and culture to share their knowledge, research, and experiences. Additional information, including previous conference programs, is available online at [www.virginiaforum.org](http://www.virginiaforum.org).