

February 21 Chapter Meeting

Railroading in the New River Valley

Bud Jeffries, official historian for the 611 Steam Excursion Program at the Virginia Museum of Transportation in Roanoke and owner of the Ingles Farm in Radford, will share his extensive knowledge of railroading in the New River Valley at the February 21 meeting of the chapter.

The coming of the railroads 1850s provided a boost to the development of southwestern Virginia and the New River Valley. Jeffries will highlight that development and the influence of railroads on the region. A rail line eventually came to Blacksburg and had a major impact on the community and the college in Blacksburg by connecting it to the outside world. While the influence of the rail connection to Blacksburg decreased in time, it nonetheless was instrumental in the building of the region and the university to their current form. History was made when the railroads came to Blacksburg and added interesting folklore to the area as well.



Mr. Jeffries is a graduate of Virginia Tech, a retired army Colonel, an author of books on railroading in the New River Valley, and a cattle rancher in Radford.

President's Message *Terry Wildman*

Uncertain times—**anxiety**—helpful resolutions?

By the time you read this newsletter, we will be well into 2017, or at least far enough for most folks to have some inkling as to the status of their latest New Year's resolutions. If you woke up on the first day of the year enamored by some new diet scheme, then I hope that's going well for you. Or, if your boss hasn't given you a raise in five years, your resolution may finally be to ask for one. But if this hasn't happened by the time you read this, chances are you've already chickened out.

OK, I know, these are not the kinds of things that interest our crowd. Chances are we may have some more fundamental things in mind. For example, I decided just before 2017 started that I needed a phone even "more smart" than the "very smart" phone I already had, realizing at the same time my ability to effectively operate either is severely compromised. But I do have intentions, having purchased (not kidding) extensive 200-page books promising to unlock the secrets of these shiny little instruments. And I promise to get to the latest one as soon as I get through the three spy novels cued up on my Kindle. There: a resolution of sorts.

To be honest though, none of the above concerns me very much. My real problem is that I know too much, or perhaps more accurately said, I hear too much. That's right, I keep my ear to the ground, or at least that might be the operative expression back in the day. The modern version of this is cable news and the fact that in my truck I can touch any of four buttons and instantly connect with the major competitors ranging from liberal to conservative, and, believe me, each employs a lot of talkers. These for the most part are pretty excitable folks, and during 2016 you can pretty much guess what the conversations were about, except when interrupted on air

Upcoming Events

February 20: "GerryRIGGED," a documentary at the Lyric (p. 5)

March 2: The New River Valley Livability in Action: Regional Exchange (p. 3)

March 2: Gerrymandering in Virginia: How to Fix it (p. 5)

Thanks to Judith and Roy Jones, who have volunteered to prepare our newsletter for mailing.

Time to Renew Your Membership!

Your 2017 membership dues are now due.

Our membership is for the calendar year. If "2017" appears on your mailing label, you have already paid. If "2016" is on your label, please send in your dues for 2017. You may use the form on the last page of this newsletter to renew your membership.



Blacksburg Chapter #2613

Chapter meetings are the third Tuesday of each month at the Blacksburg Community Center, Patrick Henry Drive at 11:30 am. There are no meetings in July or August. Board meetings are the first Tuesday of each month at the Blacksburg Community Center at 10:00 am.

Weather Policy

The Blacksburg chapter follows the weather policy of Montgomery County schools. If schools are closed, the chapter will not meet. If the school opening is delayed, the chapter will meet.

Most of us have heard of cremation and of burial to honor the death of our loved ones or friends, but there are other ways to handle a body that you might be new and unique to you. Why should you consider one of the methods? Because our environment is becoming a concern to all of us.

Each year enough metal to build the Golden Gate Bridge is buried. Caskets can be made of many different materials including bronze, copper and steel. Even on wooden caskets (some made of endangered species of wood) have handles made of metal or metal clasps. Enough wood is buried to build 1800 single family homes.

Formaldehyde, used in embalming, is highly toxic, causing eye and lung irritation. Yet, enough formaldehyde is used annually to fill 8 Olympic sized swimming pools. And once buried, this can go into our soil and aquifers which are drinking sources for many.

Cremation requires heat of 1800 degrees Fahrenheit for 2–3 hours. While cremation is becoming more and more popular (approximately 50% in 2015), the amount of fossil fuel needed to complete a cremation is about the same as driving a car 4,800 miles.

Thirteen states also allow what is called cool cremation or alkaline hydrolysis. This process, which has been used for years by universities and teaching facilities, including the Mayo Clinic, requires 92 gallons of water mixed with 4 gallons of lye. The chemicals render themselves inert and can be recycled after being put down a drain. There are “remains” should the family want something to bury or scatter. Unfortunately, Virginia does not have any funeral homes offering this service. Hopefully, one will come soon.

So what other options exist? Green burials and cemeteries are becoming more and more popular. A green burial can take place in a regular cemetery, a “green cemetery,” or on private land. In Blacksburg, you can bury one body legally on your property. However, this must be disclosed on your deed when you sell your property, and state law mandates that the buyer allow the family to “visit” their loved one in perpetuity. If you have acreage, this might not be a concern, but it might lower the value of your home within the city limits.

There are a few green cemeteries in Virginia, and the number is growing. Among other places, there are green cemeteries near Harrisonburg, Lexington, and Williamsburg. The closest green burial cemetery is at Boones Mill, just outside of Roanoke. In a green cemetery, you are not allowed to embalm, and caskets must be totally decomposable—no metal or plastic. Some people choose to wrap the loved one’s body in a favorite old quilt or simple pine casket or even a sturdy cardboard box. A British company that produces

“ecopods” is looking for a North American manufacturer (<http://www.ecopod.co.uk/>). A grave marker might or might not be allowed. One cemetery allows fieldstone that can be engraved.

Other “green” ideas include using a biodegradable urn that contains a single tree seed. When planted, the tree seed is nourished by and absorbs the nutrients of the ashes. These run about \$250. (See <http://www.ecopod.co.uk/arka-acorn-urn/>). A Capsula Mundi is a container shaped like an egg into which a body is placed in a fetal position. A tree is planted on top which the person can choose prior to death (<http://www.capsulamundi.it/en/>). EcoEternity Forest, near Williamsburg, offers a memorial forest for the burial of ashes.

Enjoy the ocean? Your ashes can be mixed with others and concrete and you can become a reef off the coast of Florida or Maine that will be home to corals and fish. There are many other choices.



Lastly, one can donate their body to science. The State Anatomical Division coordinates body donation for educational institutions. (See <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/medical-examiner/vsap/>) Arrangements must be made prior to death. There are many restrictions, so one must always have a “Plan B” should the body be rejected for donation.

The website at <http://deathforbeginners.com/greenburialva.html> includes names of green burial sites and funeral service providers in Virginia and nearby.

For more information contact the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge at fcavbr@gmail.com.

Sandy Schlaudecker is the president of the local Funeral Consumers Alliance.

Isabel Berney is an active member and the volunteer administrator of the Funeral Consumers Alliance.

President's Message *continued*

with an actual emergency.

Now, I'll admit that the year left me in a frazzled state of mind. This was disturbing enough that I'm now taking some baby steps to enter a different reflective space. As a retired person I have some free time, so occasionally I browse through Barnes & Noble—no particular reason, although perhaps unknowingly looking for sources of inspiration. So, on one of these occasions I picked up an impressive looking book of quotes (the title suggested it would change your life), and on another trip picked up a book titled "Good Poems," selected and edited by Garrison Keillor. These are stacked handily for a quick look at night before bedtime, and I will have to admit that I quite often do take advantage of this.

For example, a short quote attributed to Gertrude Stein captured one very real danger of my cable news addiction: *Everyone gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense.* Now, I'll just leave it to readers to fill in here what they consider to be the most egregious potential losses of common sense amongst our population today (*fake news* anyone?) given the variety of persistent information sources, including social media.

For me—another resolution.... I'm resolving to put some distance between me and my "talking head" friends on XM radio. Instead, I'll be spending more time on Willy's Roadhouse, Outlaw Country, Classic Vinyl, and Deep Tracks, a move my wife strongly endorses. Recently, on a several-hour trip, I enjoyed a fairly deep immersion into bar stool philosophy, lost love, lonely walls, honkytonk nights, heartbreak, and bartender therapy. Arriving happy and relaxed, I figured this is a resolution I can live with.

Perhaps on a slightly more serious note, given these (objectively, I think) disturbing times, it seems useful to not lose track of who we are. Maintaining an identity that is pretty well anchored (metaphor intended) may be the lifeline we need when the temptation strikes to go and play in the information muck that passes for news entertainment these days. Who wants to end the day angry, anxious, and fearful of some threat that is not even that well defined? Of course, this condition is perfect for the demagogues who will sell any story to create some explanation to soothe discomfort.

I'll conclude with a short poem selected by Garrison Keillor for his collection. I found this a few days ago simply by opening a random page in Keillor's 433-page collection. It's by Joyce Sutphin, and titled "Girl on a Tractor."

I knew the names of all the cows before
I knew my alphabet, but no matter the
subject, I had mastery of it, and when
it came time to help in the fields, I
learned to drive a tractor at just the right
speed, so that two men, walking
on either side of the moving wagon
could each lift a bale, walk towards
the steadily moving platform and
simultaneously hoist the hay onto
the rack, walk to the next bale, lift,
turn, and find me there, exactly where
I should be, my hand on the throttle,
carefully measuring out the pace.

Terry Wildman,
Tallahassee,
Florida,
around 1974

Meet new (and former) board member, Jim Montgomery

Jim Montgomery, a familiar face around the table at Board Meetings, returned this year for another term. During the time when away, he has been serving on the advisory council of the Agency on Aging. When not attending AARP activities, you will find Jim at his law office in Blacksburg engaged in the practice of elder law, estates, and probate of estates.

Jim, when at leisure, spends his time reading and keeping up with his grandchildren and his great grandchildren. Unless you have time on your hands, do not offer to exchange family stories or pictures with him.

Welcome back, Jim, and thanks for serving.



Livability Initiative—Regional Exchange March 2

The Livability in Action Regional Exchange will provide an opportunity for groups and small businesses to come together, network, share, and learn about new and exciting work underway across the region that supports the goals and priorities of the Livability Initiative and to identify potential partnerships and collaborations.

The Event Centre, 1655 Roanoke St, Christiansburg
2:30–5:30 pm

See nrvlivability.org/get-involved/events for the agenda and registration information.

What fun to find this! This was my own life, of course. I have been the girl as well as the men lifting the bales, and I know the tractor, the wagon, the field, and everything about it.

With this foundation, the *talking heads* don't have a chance.



Remembrance of friends who died in 2016

I'm not what you call a "deep thinker"...spending time pondering life's meanings and directions. Much of what I believe can often be summed up in the short sentences or phrases printed on inexpensive plaques that I can hang on my wall. For example, regarding friendships, let me share some favorite sayings.

"Friends are life's greatest gift."

"Friends are gifts wrapped in ribbons of thoughtfulness and trimmed with laughter and love."

"Friends and wine—the older the better."

"The greatest gift you ever own is not found in the shops or under your Christmas tree. It is found in the hearts of your family and your true friends."

"A friend is one of the nicest things you can have, and one of the best things you can be."

Today we remember and celebrate six of our departed members who were our friends...six wonderful gifts that we enjoyed and kept for as long as we could.

Ann McDaniels, who had moved to Bridgewater, VA with Carl, her husband of 64 years, passed away on January 5. She taught music in Virginia public schools and was an accomplished seamstress and quilter. In 1969, the family moved to Blacksburg where she resided for 43 years and was an active member of the Virginia Tech Faculty Women's Club, a member of the Blacksburg United Methodist Church, and a multiple Paul Harris Fellow from the Blacksburg Rotary Club. Ann was 86.



Betty Foy passed away on March 30. She graduated from the Knox General Hospital School of Nursing in 1952 and went on to work in various nursing positions in Tennessee, Missouri, California, Maryland and Virginia. In addition to serving her patients well, Betty also served her family, community and church selflessly...and especially shared the gift of hospitality. She and husband Chester, married 62 years, hosted hundreds of people in their home over the years, for meals and overnight from the Blacksburg and Virginia Tech communities and others from abroad. Betty was 84.

T. Marshall Hahn Jr., 11th President of Virginia Tech from 1962 to 1974, oversaw the transition of Tech from an all-male military college to a nationally renowned university. Mar-

shall passed away on May 19, after a decade-long battle with Parkinson's disease. After his tenure at Virginia Tech, Marshall and his wife Peggy, moved to Portland, Oregon, and later Atlanta, Georgia, where he served as President and CEO of Georgia Pacific Corporation, parlaying a degree in physics to selling toilet paper to the world. After his retirement, Marshall and Peggy moved back to their home at Hickory Hill Farm where they continued to raise cattle, sheep, goats, and eye-brows. Marshall was 89.

JoAnn Underwood, president of the Blacksburg AARP chapter in 2008, passed away quietly surrounded by family and friends at Warm Hearth Village on November 13. She was a loving sister, mother and grandmother, as well as an artist, feminist, nurse, health educator, loyal friend, community builder—and a rabble-rouser. She was known as the "Dr. Ruth of Virginia Tech" when she worked there in the 80s and 90s because she talked freely about healthy sexuality. In addition, JoAnn served as the progressive leader for gay/lesbian acceptance and in 2014 received the Virginia Tech Ally of the Year award, now renamed the JoAnn Underwood Ally Award in her honor, for her work with the LGBT community. JoAnn was 87.

Wayne Patty passed away on December 8. He enjoyed his 40 years in the Mathematics Department at Virginia Tech, having served 25 of those years as department chair. He also served in the United States Army during the Korean Conflict. Wayne was a devoted member of the Fairlawn Presbyterian Church in Radford and is survived by his wife Diane and their three children. He was 84.

Paul (Tony) Distler, Alumni Distinguished Professor Emeritus who devoted most of his adult years to creating and building the Arts at Virginia Tech and in the New River Valley, passed away on December 28. Hired at Virginia Tech to inaugurate a theatre program in 1967, Tony also took over the music program 3 years later and developed a communications program as well. In 1979, he became the Director of the new School of the Arts. Tony created the Marching Virginians in 1973, now a 330-member marching band, and was the PA announcer for the band for 40 years. Tony's commitment and work also extended to Warm Hearth Village and Planned Parenthood. He was 79.

We give thanks today for these wonderful friends...truly life's greatest gifts.

1. VEDP (Virginia Economic Development Partnership): a state agency that failed us—a deal gone bad! VEDP approved a grant of \$1.4 million (unsecured) to Lindenburg Industry to convert a furniture factory into a catalytic converter plant. The plant was to employ over 300 people and provide other financial stimulus to our state. THE PLANT NEVER OPENED. And there are now no former Lindenburg assets to repay the loan other than an empty building and foreclosure monies now in control of a Virginia Court. Two or three parties including the State are attempting to obtain the money from the court for their expenses and past services to Lindenburg.

How did this happen? VEDP never validated if Lindenburg was a qualified company to receive the grant and did not practice due diligence in approving the grant. In addition, Lindenburg performed a number of acts to mislead investors which were not discovered until late in the cycle. Unfortunately, VEDP was set-up years ago as a quasi-independent agency allowing them to avoid the normal control over State agencies. The primary parties who approved the grant are no longer employed by VEDP.

What is being done to avoid future mishaps like this? Both the Governor and the General Assembly are proposing various measures to control the operational acts of VEDP both internally and externally. And efforts are also being made to recover the monies now being held by the Virginia Court. The outlook for the money being returned is unknown.

A lesson painfully learned! Both the Governor and General Assembly members must insure in the future these semi-independent agencies have much better controls both internally and externally and be closely managed through effective oversight with strict accountability measurements in place. AND FOR US? We must more effectively communicate to our representatives that transparency in government is not a public relations slogan but one of the criteria we will use in measuring their performance.

2. Long term care-nursing homes. Previously patients in federally funded homes were required to sign arbitration agreements to settle their disputes with the owners. Under new rules soon to be released, they will be allowed to use the courts thereby giving more transparency to their family and the general public about the conditions in these homes.

3. State AARP 2017 Legislative Priorities. A first draft has been released and RETIREMENT SECURITY seems to be at the top of the list as it was in 2016. Many Virginians have no convenient way to save for retirement via payroll deductions through their employer. Some of the other priorities are state assistance for family caregivers and an expanded program for those in-patient care homes who are not able to speak for themselves.

Gerrymandering in Virginia

Virginia is the 5th worst gerrymandered state in the union, based on lack of compactness and contiguity of its districts, both congressional and state. Gerrymandering is the process by which political district lines are drawn by the very politicians who stand to benefit by them. In Virginia, state legislators redraw district lines after every 10-year census (the next one is in 2020).

Two upcoming programs provide information and suggest solutions.

Lyric Theatre, Monday, February 20, 3:00 pm (President's Day)
GerryRIGGED: Turning Democracy On Its Head

This one-hour documentary shows how technology has made gerrymandering such an exact science that, in most cases, incumbents cannot lose and challengers cannot win. In this documentary, we see how non-partisan reform efforts now underway in Virginia and elsewhere can change this dangerous trend and return political power to the voters. Produced by Richmond Public Television (WCVE) and OneVirginia 2021.

Blacksburg Municipal Building, Thursday, March 2, 7:30–9 pm
Gerrymandering in Virginia: How We Can Fix It

Bob Gibson, journalist and immediate past director of the Sorensen Institute for Political Action at the University of Virginia, and the Honorable **Shannon Valentine**, former member of the House of Delegates, will speak on how the redistricting process works in Virginia and what we need to do to fix it so that districts reflect the population rather than being artificial constructs to ensure a legislator's re-election. The program is co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County and the Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech.

This discussion is timely because the next census is not far away, and a nonpartisan redistricting procedure requires a constitutional amendment.

Both the film and the discussion are free and open to the public.

Chapter Officers 2017

President • Terry Wildman, wiley@vt.edu

Vice President • Wendy Baldwin, wendybburg@gmail.com

Secretary • Pat Hyer, hyerp@vt.edu

Treasurer • Pat Ballard, pballard@vt.edu

Board of Directors

• 2017—Pat Hyer, Jerry Niles, Shirley Peterson

• 2018—Wendy Baldwin, Ryan Martin, Ray Van Dyke

• 2019—Tamara Hodsdon, Peter Magolda, Jim Montgomery, Wanda Smith



Blacksburg Chapter #2613
 Don Creamer, President
 P.O. Box 10082
 Blacksburg, VA 24062

**Nonprofit
 Organization
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Blacksburg, VA
 Permit No. 32**

AARP Member Application for 2017

Name: _____

Spouse/Partner: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Annual (Calendar Year) Dues: **\$15.00** (includes spouse or partner)

New ___ Renewal ___ 90+ years old (free) ___

Please consider an additional donation to support our AARP chapter and its projects. \$10___ \$25___ \$50___ \$100___ Other \$___

Donations to the Blacksburg Chapter help us carry out our mission and community service activities while keeping member dues as low as possible. However, donations to the chapter are not tax deductible.

Please make your check payable to "Blacksburg AARP Chapter #2613."
 Mail the check and this form to: .

Tom Alston - P.O. Box 10082 • Blacksburg, VA 24062