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OPENERS

For the Love of Reading

by Lyn C. A. Gardner and Cy Dillon

This special issue of Virginia Libraries is devoted to what brought most of us here in the first place—the love of reading. As library staff, we rejoice in books and do what we can to foster both literacy and reading for pleasure. During tough times and budget cuts, and in the face of reports that voluntary reading is on the decline, it’s important to celebrate what we’re doing to foster this mission. We want to get communities excited about our libraries by reawakening the love of books of all types and genres, and presenting patrons with chances to meet the authors who make our existence possible. To that end, this issue is devoted to some of the many literary events and programs being sponsored by libraries, as well as interviews with Virginia authors.

Much speculation on the future of libraries stems from the fear that books as we know them may be perceived to have decreasing relevance in modern lives. Though there are also many positive aspects of alternative media, such as e-texts and online book groups, ever since the advent of the television age, authors have been losing readers to other media. The fears raised in the fifties have some merit: the amount of time children spend with a TV on in the room does seem to have a negative impact on their ability to focus on reading (indeed, the rapid shifts of commercials are thought by some to contribute to ADD). Even children and adults who enjoy books often spend at least as much leisure time watching visual entertainments as reading. Though the Internet often involves reading, some posit that browsing online has decreased readers’ attention span.

Furthermore, publishing, which has been in decline for years, has entered a new level of crisis with the current recession. In November, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt put a halt to acquiring new titles for its trade (including fiction) and reference divisions, and many positions have been eliminated. Random House, also cutting positions, has consolidated its five adult publishing groups into three, and has absorbed the Bantam Dell Publishing Group, including Bantam Dell, the Dial Press, and Spiegel & Grau. Continuing the trend of eliminating positions, Doubleday has sheltered part of its operations under the Knopf umbrella as the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, and the rest have joined the Crown Publishing Group. Simon & Schuster is also cutting jobs.

What does this mean for readers? There will be less variety; less fresh, new voices; and more emphasis on mass appeal than unique voices. Readers will have fewer choices in the present, and the impact may carry forward into the future, as many current writers, already struggling to scrape by and usually working other jobs, may of necessity decide to hang up their hats, while other emerging writers may be silenced before we even have the chance to hear their voices. Even if some of these writers reemerge if the publishing climate stabilizes, readers will have been cheated out of the many wonderful books they might have produced; while other writers, hurried on by the demands of life, may never return.

What does this mean for libraries? Aside from the fact that we need varied content to fill our shelves and maximize our value to our communities, good writing is the lifeblood of reading. Readers who do not encounter those unique voices that speak to them may find less and less reason to turn to reading when so many other pursuits clamor for attention. Further, libraries are as essential to authors as the reverse:

“I received the fundamentals of my education in school, but that was not enough. My real education, the superstructure, the details, the true architecture, I got out of the public library. For an impoverished child whose family could not afford to buy books, the library was the open door to wonder and achievement, and I can never be sufficiently grateful that I had the wit to charge through that door and make the most of it. Now, when I read constantly about the way in which library funds are being cut and cut, I can only think that the door is closing and that American society has found one more way to destroy itself.”

—Isaac Asimov, I, Asimov (1994)
whether through budget cuts or the failure in publishing, without rich content in libraries, some future writers may never develop.

How can libraries help? Fears over the future of libraries and reading may never entirely disappear. Maybe it’s time to stop worrying and simply celebrate the wonderful world we have to offer. Enthusiasm is catching; by sharing our joy, we may reawaken that wonder in our patrons. There are many things that libraries are already doing, and doing well—book clubs, reading recommendations, literacy programs of all sorts, eye-catching displays, author talks and programs, and other exciting and creative events that bring good books to the notice of patrons and help give them the tools to enjoy them. Just take a look at some of the articles in this issue. So let’s take a moment to appreciate all the ways we strive to inspire the love of reading in others. Libraries and authors need one another. Let’s continue to support each other to make a brighter future for all of us—readers most of all!

Cy Dillon

I have to confess not connecting libraries with authors until I was in college. As a child and adolescent I looked at libraries the way an NFL lineman might look at a pancake house, as a simple opportunity for consumption. After reading my way through our elementary and high school libraries and attacking the bookmobile every month for years, I imagined myself well-read for an eighteen-year-old. Then I had a course from Dabney Stuart. Dabney, author of more than a dozen volumes himself, drove generations of Washington and Lee students to scour the library for things he assumed they should have already read. I left his office more than once with lists of critics or writers whose works were essential to understanding twentieth-century literature, and later—in some cases years later—marked off each item completed with a sense of accomplishment.

Now, forty years after those long afternoons reading next to an open window in the stacks, I understand more about the symbiotic relationship between libraries and authors. That makes me particularly appreciative of my friend and colleague Dr. Richard L. Smith. You may have seen him on the History Channel discussing the importance of Timbuktu as a center for trade long before the colonial era; he looks

“You must live feverishly in a library. Colleges are not going to do any good unless you are raised and live in a library every day of your life.”

RAY BRADBURY, WRITER’S DIGEST, FEBRUARY 1976

part of a seasoned African explorer. Smith came to Ferrum College from Rutgers even before I arrived here, and he has spent the intervening years teaching thousands of undergraduates, serving as a department and division chair, and producing articles and books on the history of Africa and Asia. During that time our library—and the study of history in general—has benefited from his publications, but an even more important influence on us has been his guidance in ordering books to support the numerous classes he has designed and taught. And, like my mentor, he has required his students to use the library. Obviously anyone who provides us with good books, expert acquisitions advice, and serious researchers is a great asset.

In a recent conversation Smith told me that for two decades after coming to Ferrum he made annual trips to either the Library of Congress or the Columbia University Library to access the seventy or more volumes and the numerous articles he read each year to pursue his research. But as improvements in interlibrary loans and the development of electronic resources reached a tipping point in the 1990s, he realized that he could work here and avoid the stays in Washington and New York.

Smith’s research has provided some interesting challenges to our staff, both because of the languages involved and because of the rarity of some of the works he needed to borrow. When asked which languages he read most often, Smith said, “Close to half are in French, but occasionally I’ll get something in Portuguese depending on the topic I’m working on. I actually work in some pretty weird languages, such as proto-Afro-Asian and proto-Nilo-Saharan, but I don’t do the actual translation of texts.” As we discussed some of the unusual requests he had made, Smith explained, “I did get an original work published in 1802 some years ago. Probably the most unusual experience I had in this regard concerned a work of geography written by the Andalusian scholar al-Bakri in the eleventh century. I ordered this in a French translation that was published in the 1850s, but what I got was an actual copy of al-Bakri’s work in the original Arabic (the book itself obviously wasn’t from the eleventh century). So I ordered it in French, and it came in Arabic, and I was delighted.”

In spite of the sophistication of his research, Smith’s most recent writings are aimed at undergraduate history students in courses on Islam and in introductory world history courses. We just received our copies of Premodern Trade in World History, and it is a sure bet
to circulate frequently. What more could a librarian ask?

Lyn C. A. Gardner

The biggest influence on my own literary life, both as a reader and a writer, has always been my father, Delbert R. Gardner. While I inherited a love of reading from both parents, with fond memories of both reading to us from an early age, my father carried on the tradition of reading aloud to our family long past the time when we could read for ourselves. He would read with gusto at the dinner table, in Saturday-morning living-room gatherings, or in the car on family trips from classics such as A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court or the adventures of Groo the Wanderer. When I reached my early teens, my father opened a new world to me, drawing on my own interest in mythology, medieval legends, and fantasy fiction to introduce me to the works of such authors as Tennyson, Browning, Keats, and William Morris (about whom Dad had published a scholarly book, and whose The Life and Death of Jason thrilled me as much as John Gardner’s Jason and Medea at age fourteen). Throughout our lives, Dad shared with us the joy of reading all types of works; and, as a former English professor, he elucidated aspects of classic works that helped us appreciate them all the more.

Likewise, from the beginning, I loved my father’s enthusiasm for pounding the keys of his heavy manual typewriter, creating drafts of stories and poems that he would meticulously polish before giving them to my mother, who typed clean copies and revised versions for submission. I loved Dad’s desk, with his wooden file box and small notebook for submissions. He shared each new publication, sometimes reading them aloud to us; indeed, he could still quote his own poems in conversation years later. I grew up loving the magical world of books, and seeing firsthand how a writer lived inside them. I always knew I wanted to be a writer like my father; and when the time came, he showed me how to submit my work, and gave me a postage allowance each month despite our limited means.

While both our parents took us on many library jaunts throughout the years, Dad continued to share the library experience with me long past childhood. In addition to taking me to a variety of academic libraries on many occasions during high school and college (we loved hunting down literary clues together), he also saw the library as the perfect place for me to work—and he was right. He encouraged me to apply to our local library when I was sixteen. From my teenage days as a page and then library assistant while I paid for college, through my years as a research assistant at a museum library upon achieving my master’s in English literature, to my present work as catalog librarian at Hampton Public Library, I’ve loved the chance to work with books and the people who enjoy them. Dad was as proud that I became a librarian as I was pleased to be one; though he was eighty at the time, he and my mother drove all the way to Tallahassee, Florida, from Newport News to attend my MLIS graduation. He was always happy about my involvement in the world of books.

Along with his love of family, literary pursuits shaped his life. Among other occupations, he spent twenty-one years as a professor of English literature and creative writing (whereby he met my mother, a talented former student with whom he stayed in touch) and another fourteen years as a writer-editor for the government. Throughout their marriage, my parents continued reading aloud to each other on car trips of any length, in waiting rooms and hospitals, filling hours of waiting with this pleasure they shared. On what turned out to be the last day of his life, my sister and I took turns reading to Dad when he could neither rest nor speak. Earlier in 2008, I had begun submitting his writing for him; we enjoyed discussing his work and what might be done to complete it. In the hospital, I told him how much I admired his work and vowed to continue striving to complete his publications. At his funeral, his sister-in-law spoke of how Dad opened the world of literature to her by urging her to read Raintree County; having discovered she’d never read it, he spent a day of their vacation hunting through a dusty bookshop for the then out-of-print work, which she fell in love with as well. One of my brothers was named in part for its author, Ross Lockridge.

Dad died on September 21, 2008. I’ve been finding it extremely difficult to concentrate or stay motivated even for the simplest tasks. Writing this column has been an almost insurmountable goal (and has been the first piece of writing I’ve managed to complete since he entered the hospital). The delay of this special issue is entirely my fault, and I beg the pardon of our readers and writers alike. But while it’s difficult to find strength to continue, I’m determined to carry on his work—making sure his writing is remembered; continuing to live the literary dream we both shared; and perhaps most important of all, helping to share our passion for reading.

“I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.”

JORGE LUIS BORGES
Libraries, Books, Readers, and Writers

by Donna Cote

People turn to library for access to information, technology, programs, exhibits, lectures, and much and in times like more than ever, they turn to us for a core service: books.

As the economy worse, I’m sure my library isn’t alone in noticing that business is better than ever. More people are discovering libraries as a painless resource for cost savings. At public library, it’s clear that people are spending reading more. Traffic at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library (CRRL) system is up 10 percent over last year. People are borrowing books instead of buying them, and they’re thumbing through the library’s magazines instead of paying for subscriptions.

Savvy library users are saving gas, too, placing holds online and only heading to the library when they’ve been notified that the items are ready for pickup. Requests for reserves are up so much from last year—13.5 percent—that we’ve had to add shelves to hold the reserves.

So, if hard times are bringing more people through the doors of our libraries, that’s a good thing! Let them read books! Books help us rise up to who we can be. Books convey meaning, help us understand the world. Books offer shared experience; books are connectors.

Speaking about literacy, education, and the economy to an ALA gathering in 2005, Senator Barack Obama said it all: “And so the moment we persuade a child, any child, to cross that threshold into a library, we’ve changed their lives forever, and for the better. This is an enormous force for good.”

Libraries are the places where writers and readers meet, whether at library book clubs, at author talks and signings, or simply in the quiet moments when a reader sinks into a comfortable chair in a library nook and communes with a writer’s work.

Like many public libraries, my library holds an annual Staff Appreciation Day. One of the highlights—next to the delicious potluck lunch, of course—is the author presentation. All of us who wrestle on most days with budgets, personnel issues, technology, problem patrons, and building breakdowns enjoy the opportunity to sit back for an hour and let ourselves be transported to the writer’s world. Isn’t this—enjoying and appreciating literature—why we became librarians in the first place?

This year at the CRRL we were fortunate to have Pulitzer Prize winner and newly appointed Poet Laureate of Virginia Claudia Emerson read to the staff from her just-released book, Figure Studies.

She interspersed her reading with affectionate anecdotes about the people and places that inspired her poems, offering her listeners an intimate look into a poet’s thought process. She entertained audience questions afterwards, answering everything from what she does about writer’s block to her memories of her first published poem. She left us all with a wonderful story about her father, who anxiously advised her to drive carefully over Afton Mountain, ending with the admonition that, if she came to a boul-
der in the road, she should “just go around it!”

Just as librarians have a special place in their hearts for writers, so do writers for libraries. Claudia Emerson has been a loyal library supporter for years. She judges our annual teen poetry contest and appears at the awards ceremony to praise and introduce each of the winners. She proudly told the audience at Staff Day that one of the grand prize winners she selected has recently had her poetry published in a major poetry magazine. To her, the library is an extension of her work as an English professor.

No doubt every VLA member could tell similar stories from their own libraries about the bond between readers, writers, and libraries. Whether writers are newly published or well established, we welcome them at our libraries for readings, book signings, and author talks. We feature them in book displays, on our websites, and in one-on-one conversations with readers looking for new books.

It’s well and good that libraries are no longer just book repositories; we are, indeed, providers of access to information and cultural programming. But nurturing writers and promoting awareness and access to books is arguably the highest value libraries bring to our communities. In the words of Librarian of Congress James H. Billington, “Libraries are starting places for the adventure of learning that can go on whatever one’s vocation and location in life. Reading is an adventure like that of discovery itself. Libraries are our base camp.”

To take us Lands away,
Nor any Courser like a Page
Of prancing Poetry.

Notes


Capturing Characters on Stage for the College and Community: An Interview with Playwright Rex Stephenson

by Tina L. Hanlon

Most people probably think of theatres and libraries as being worlds apart, but Ferrum College’s Sale Theatre and Stanley Library are next door to each other. Thanks to recent renovations on campus, only a few steps will take you from the library’s back door into the theatre, across an attractive patio that theatre-goers enjoy during summer plays. Many of those plays have been written by R. Rex Stephenson since he founded the Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre in 1978. Even during years when getting inside the library required more steps, there was plenty of traffic between the two buildings. Drama majors writing and performing their own senior plays over the years had no excuses for shirking on their research or writing skills, with librarians and tutors next door in the library. Among many dramatic requests for library resources, the most unusual one was probably a trash can borrowed once for a prop. Librarian George Loveland had fun putting a bar code on it, checking it out, and later sending an overdue notice to get the trash can back from the theatre. Faculty members, librarians, visiting actors, and local children who come together to perform in summer plays pop into the library to read a magazine, use the Internet, or do a little background research during short breaks from arduous labor in the theatre. And Stephenson’s remarkable career as a playwright, director, and actor often takes him to libraries and archives for research and performances.

Soon after he came to Ferrum to teach drama in 1973, Stephenson began adapting Appalachian Jack Tales, traditional folktales about the magical adventures of a country boy named Jack. In his seventies in the late 1970s, the renowned storyteller and folklore collector Richard Chase visited Ferrum as a consultant for Stephenson’s Jack Tale Players. Chase’s books The Jack Tales and Grandfather Tales have made mountain folktales from Virginia and North Carolina popular throughout North America since the 1940s. “Wicked John and the Devil,” about a mean blacksmith who tricks the devil, is a tale that Chase told orally to Stephenson so that he could dramatize it without permissions expenses, and it is still a perennial favorite with the Jack Tale Players. Since 1999 Stephenson has also adapted tales with female heroes, such as “Ashpet,” “Catskins,” and my favorite, “Mutsmag,” about a spunky girl who defeats a giant and a witch. Stephenson’s own roles in “Mutsmag” range from playing a door and a giant’s ugly daughter to a one-eyed robber and the king of Virginia.

In December 2005 the Jack Tale Players gave their thirtieth anniversary performance at Callaway Elementary School, in the same auditorium as their first public show in 1975. They have performed more than 3,000 times in 35 states and England, at schools, veterans’ hospitals, parks, churches, conferences, and community centers. One public performance this summer kicked off a library summer reading program, “Tales, Legends, and Lore,” at the Spencer-Penn Center in Spencer, Virginia.

In 2007 the Southeastern Theatre Conference honored Stephenson with one of the most prestigious awards in the field of child drama.

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the Sara Spencer Award. Nellie McCaslin, who remained a mentor after supervising his doctoral work at New York University in the 1980s, dedicated the eighth edition of her creative drama textbook to Stephenson in 2005 just before her death ended a distinguished career as a dramatist, scholar, and professor. She called Stephenson’s summer plays for families “a unique and highly successful example of intergenerational theatre,” praising the Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre for the professional and social benefits of productions in which local and professional actors, young interns, teenagers, and children work together, drawing in parents, tourists, and others to enjoy the plays. This collaboration is also led by Executive Director Jody D. Brown, a retired English professor and excellent actress. Emily Rose Tucker, who started as a summer college intern, is musical director, composer, and often a lead performer in BRDT plays.

Many characters that Stephenson brings to life from the pages of folklore archives, historical documents, and classic literature find themselves back on library shelves in his published plays. His folktales appear in six published scripts and several textbooks and journals. Eighteen other published plays are based on historical events, from Galileo’s scientific discoveries to a trial that freed a woman from slavery in Franklin County, as well as Bible stories and literature by Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, and Mark Twain. Stephenson has also portrayed the American master of fiction and social satire for many years in An Evening with Mark Twain. One of the first times Stephenson asked me to serve as a script consultant, for The Jungle Book, he ignored my protestations that I was not a Kipling expert, so I went off to the library to read more about Kipling. Subsequent research has taken me to Dickens’ homes in southeastern England and to the OED to figure out whether words such as “Dad” and “teenager” were anachronistic in nineteenth-century dialogue. When I found myself on local television with Stephenson and McCaslin in 2000, the interviewer was amazed to hear how many variations of “Snow White” we had studied. Thus I learned firsthand that these plays involve varied types of research and offer interesting possibilities for educational projects. I prepared study guides for several of Stephenson’s plays published by Pat Whitton Forrest at New Plays for Children in Charlottesville (http://www.newplaysforchildren.com/index.cfm), who likes to integrate teaching materials with the scripts she publishes. I enjoyed digging deeper into the playwright’s views on drama and research for this interview.

VL Were libraries important to you when you were young in rural Indiana, before you became a playwright in Virginia?
The Jack Tale Players perform Rex Stephenson's adaptation of “Quare Jack” at the Rocky Mount Farmers’ Market, July 25, 2008. Rex points things out to John Isner, a Ferrum graduate and successful actor.

Because I was a commuter at college, when I had free time, I went to the library; and the more I was there, the more I discovered things. My biggest discovery during my freshman year was the reference room. I found answers to every question I have ever had in there. As a matter of fact, the reference librarian got to know me by my first name. I didn't make very good grades my freshman year, but I learned a lot.

I like a library. I like the smells of a library. I like the feeling of being in a place where they have everything I want. There's something about a book—you hold it and you look at the words and you read it out loud. Then you go to the bibliography and you get to find more books. Sometimes when I'm in a library I just pull out a book at random and read a couple of paragraphs to see if the author is an ordinary writer or a wordsmith. I worry that kids today don't appreciate a library. It's gotten to be a generational thing. When my daughter Juliet thinks of doing research she goes to the Internet. But libraries are important for kids; they are safe, and generally filled with people who enjoy reading and helping people find what they're looking for.

I know you started dramatizing Appalachian folktales in 1975 after your daughter Janice brought home a copy of Richard Chase’s The Jack Tales from school. I've heard that many other storytellers and writers were inspired by hearing a librarian or teacher read these same folktales during their childhood. Do you encounter many people who know the folktales from books?

It is amazing the number of people that will come up to me after a show and say, “My third grade teacher read us these stories when I was in elementary school.” I remember once we were playing at a festival in Newport News and a lady showed me her copy of The Jack Tales. She had asked for it for Christmas because the copy in the library was always checked out. I'm also astonished at the number of people I've met that had heard Richard Chase tell stories. And all that have talked to me speak of...
their encounter with Chase almost reverently. I can say honestly that Chase was the finest storyteller I ever heard.

**VL** How important has research been since you began writing your own plays?

**RRS** When I first started dramatizing the Jack Tales, our library got me all kinds of books on interlibrary loan on folktales and Appalachian history. Back then, Appalachian Studies wasn’t “in.” I was over there every other week bugging them. They were good about getting every book or article I was looking for. Luckily for me later, I met Richard Chase, Cratis Williams, and members of the Hicks family of North Carolina storytellers. This combination of hearing the stories and listening to the background of the tales plus the scholarly research included in books by Chase and Williams gave me an appreciation I try to capture when I dramatize a folktale. When I went to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, that’s when I discovered the work of earlier Appalachian storytellers and collectors, such as Jane Gentry and Isobel Gordon Carter. Raymond Sloan was another excellent collector of folktales and folk songs in Franklin County. He told me stories, explained how the Virginia Writers’ Project worked when he collected for the WPA, and gave me names of people to interview.

Another fortuitous thing that happened was just pure dumb luck. I was tracing back some of Chase’s informants and I went to Wise County in search of Dicey Adams, who had told Chase a number of Jack Tales. She was the widow of James Taylor Adams, who had headed the Virginia Writers’ Project in southwestern Virginia. When I talked to Dicey, she told me that everything they had on folklore had been given to a local library. At the library, I found the “lost” folklore collection that had not been published when the Virginia Writers’ Project closed in 1942. It was thousands of pages packed away in boxes, with all the WPA collectors’ original stories from southwestern Virginia. Most of the folktales that I have dramatized came from this collection.

**VL** And the same James Taylor Adams Collection is now archived in Ferrum’s Blue Ridge Institute. The links between the oral tradition, archives, and books are fascinating. I’ve read that librarians spread the art of telling traditional folktales to children around America and Britain in the early twentieth century. In Chase’s books and many other collections by storytellers, the authors encourage readers to tell the tales out loud in their own way after reading them. In your story theatre performances with the Jack Tale Players, I’ve heard you encourage audiences to read the tales in books by Richard Chase or the Grimm Brothers. How do you view the relationship between your adaptations and stories in books?

**RRS** At every show we try to do a little plug for reading. After we tell the audience about the books, librarians sometimes say, “We don’t have it but we’ll get it before you come back next time.” I just want kids to discover reading and Mr. Chase’s books. Once I had a rare invitation to say a few words to the audience when I attended a production of my adaptation of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. I used this opportunity to encourage them all to read Twain’s version. To me, an adaptation of a classic story should just be the springboard that encourages children to go back to the original source.

**VL** Tell me about your summer performances at the Franklin County Library. I’ve seen the meeting room there packed with enthusiastic audiences of all ages at Jack Tale shows.

**RRS** We used to perform at the Rocky Mount Community and Hospitality Center in the old train station, too, or the courthouse, but since the new library opened a few years ago, we have performed there. The meeting room is not an ideal space for a performance, but to do a show surrounded by books—it is a great environment. Getting to know and working with a good children’s librarian is important. Franklin County has one of the best in Joyce Tuckloff. One of the good things about performing at the library is that children and parents come to the shows together, or children and grandparents, unlike our shows in the schools.

**VL** I agree with what you’ve said about the joys of libraries and books. But librarians also make valuable electronic resources available to us these days. When my website AppLit ([http://www.ferrum.edu/applit/](http://www.ferrum.edu/applit/)) was created during a workshop sponsored by our library and the Appalachian College Association in 2000, you ran over to the library several times bringing me material for AppLit’s first bibliographies and study guides. How has the Internet contributed to your work as a dramatist?

**RRS** There are things on the Internet that would not get wide distribution if it were not for sites like AppLit. The example that comes to mind is the story Raymond Sloan told me, “Jack and His Lump of Silver.” I had published his story in a small journal, and I
doubt if many people read it there. However, when it went on AppLit, I know a number of people read the story. For example, my sister-in-law, Sharon Stephenson, heard a storyteller in Indiana tell “Jack and His Lump of Silver.” She said, “My brother-in-law tells the same story.” And the storyteller said, “Yes, I got it on a website from a little college in Virginia.” Whenever we do kids’ shows, we like to provide teachers with background information. Now we just recommend the website, and not only do teachers use it, but we’ve also discovered their students go to it.

**VL** Writing your adaptations of classic literature requires getting to know the books very well. Sometimes you even include the author as a character in the frame story of a play. What kinds of research are involved in writing these plays?

**RRS** Most of the classics I have dramatized came out of my youth. They were the books I read and reread as a child, like Treasure Island, or books like Alice in Wonderland that I read to my girls. Then, because I love them so much, to try to stay objective a little bit, I’ll usually go over to Stanley Library and spend an afternoon with criticism and biography so I can see what other people have said about the story, or just sometimes to try to get in the author’s head, to find out why he wrote this story. I try to tell the same story the author told.

My research on Robert Louis Stevenson led to the frame story about him and his stepson in my play Treasure Island. I discovered that he wrote the book chapter by chapter as a gift for his stepson when he didn’t have money for anything else. It seemed like a logical frame, more appealing to modern children because the relationship was through a divorce and remarriage. They got along so well that they make good role models for families today.

**VL** How do you research your plays based on historical events?

**RRS** In most of the history plays I’ve written, I’ve had historians that provided a lot of guidance for me. Historians by their very nature always send you to the primary sources. What constantly amazes me is how many primary sources you can find in a library. When I was writing a play about Cecil Sharp, the English folklorist who collected folk songs in the South and came through Franklin County in 1918, I think I spent three days in London doing research at the Cecil Sharp House (home of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library and the English Folk Dance and Song Society). After that, the play wrote itself.

My most recent endeavor, When the Lights Go On Again, is a musical revue about World War II. I not only wanted it to encompass the music of the era, but I also wanted the story line to be about something. Now, I grew up in a time when people talked about the war a lot. Most of my relatives had been in the service or had worked in defense plants, and I remember always listening to their stories. And oftentimes the name Ernie Pyle came up. One day in my high school library I ran across a copy of his book Brave Men. I’ve been an Ernie Pyle fan ever since. I think part of the reason that I almost memorized some of Pyle’s newspaper articles was so that I could be included in the conversations with my relatives about the war. It was just logical for me to go back and include excerpts from his wartime articles in my musical revue.

**VL** Your family plays have been supported by the Nellie McCaslin Endowment each summer since your mentor at New York University died in 2005. Tell me about the special relationship between Nellie McCaslin and Ferrum College.

**RRS** Dr. McCaslin was always a strong proponent of intergenerational theatre—in other words, blending performers of a variety of ages into one production—so it was not really difficult for me to talk her into becoming one of our actresses in some summer plays. She was, I think, eighty-four when she did her first play for me in 1999. The youngest member of that cast was seven, so it was truly cast in a manner that she had long advocated.

We were very fortunate at Ferrum that Dr. McCaslin left her personal library to Stanley Library. She had all the primary books from the early history of children’s theatre and creative drama plus so many modern reference works and plays. Because Dr. McCaslin’s tenure at NYU was so long, whenever one of her students would publish something, they would automatically send her a copy. If you add into that the fact that she probably knew personally most practitioners of creative drama in the United States and England, and they would also send her books, it was indeed quite an impressive and unique collection.

**VL** I admire the way you capture the language and rhythms of the original text when you adapt classic works of literature. Book lovers often criticize dramatic adaptations or films because they don’t include everything in the book. How do you handle this problem when adapting a novel?
The Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre performs Rex Stephenson’s recent play, Little Women: A Musical.

Notes


Fairfax County Public Library—
Reaching Out to Readers

by Edwin S. Clay III and Patricia Bangs

Last July, just after the new fiscal year began, the collection management and acquisitions coordinator for the Fairfax County Public Library (FCPL) sent an email to all information staff. It read, in part, “FY 2008 was a banner year for FCPL collection use. Use of the hard copy collection went up substantially…. Circulation went over 13,065,309 for the first time.” While the “good news/bad news” message went on to outline some necessary cost-cutting, the 9 percent increase in circulation since FY 2007, much of it printed material, is evidence that reading is alive and well in Fairfax County.

This is no accident. Like most library systems in the state, as well as the entire country, FCPL has had to redefine itself in the wake of all the changes brought about by the digital age. Yet books and reading are still an integral part of our library system’s formula, which also includes an emphasis on online services, as well as promoting library branches as centers for civic engagement.

To connect readers and potential readers with books and authors, the Fairfax County Public Library offers an array of outreach activities through its Early Literacy Outreach program for preschoolers; the Center for the Book, which brings adult programming to the community; All Fairfax Reads, a one-book/one-community initiative; Fall for the Book, an annual book festival cosponsored by the library; Changing Lives Through Literature, an alternative sentencing program for offenders in the court system; and BookCast, a bimonthly audio podcast interview with authors posted on the library’s website.

Early Literacy

The library’s Early Literacy Outreach program launched in December 2004. It is designed to teach early literacy skills to preschoolers and their caregivers who cannot, or do not, visit a library. To staff this program, a new position was created. The early literacy manager acts as an outreach extension for each of the library’s twenty-two regular branches. She serves off-site schools, child care centers, community centers, parent groups, and teachers. The program is designed to introduce children, their caregivers, and teachers to the concepts of early literacy, as well as the resources available at their local library branch. The manager also trained a volunteer corps to increase her reach into the community.

The program has three goals: (1) provide preschoolers and care-
Paul Rusesabagina, subject of the film Hotel Rwanda and savior of thousands of lives during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, signs copies of his book, An Ordinary Man, as part of the library’s 2006 Perspectives Series.

givers who could not visit library branches with programs that use the principles of early literacy; (2) model these programs to teachers in preschool settings; and (3) encourage the use of resources in the home or at the library.

At each visit, the early literacy manager, or one of the volunteers, presents and models a story time, often including finger plays, and encourages caregivers to allow youngsters as young as six months to handle books and be read to.

The early literacy manager may visit as many as four locations in one day. Some may have a hundred preschoolers or more whom she sees in small groups. At each visit, she distributes free picture books to youngsters and their caregivers. Various Friends of the Library groups and individuals have donated funds to buy these books. The library’s events calendar and other material publicizing library branch events are also distributed.

After each visit, the early literacy outreach manager reports back to the local library branch manager with the numbers of individuals who attended. She also shares any additional information, such as special community programs where the library might wish to be represented. The manager acts as “the eyes and ears” for the local FCPL library branch in the community, letting people know the array of programs and services available for preschoolers.

Through the first half of 2008, the early literacy specialist and her corps of trained volunteers, who often include retired public library and elementary school children’s librarians, presented 400 programs to more than 8,600 preschoolers and/or their caregivers in an array of nonlibrary settings.

The success of the program can be measured in the comments from groups the early literacy outreach manager has visited. The president of a Mom’s Club wrote: “Thank you so much for speaking to our group of stay-at-home mothers. As we raise our little ones, we serve as parents and teachers—your information about literacy and county libraries helped us meet our demanding roles.” A library branch manager in a low-income area of the county was thrilled with outreach contacts made: “I just wanted to let you know that your outreach work with Timberlane Elementary School sparked a first-ever request from them to do on-site branch tours with students and parents. We discovered during the tours that many of the parents didn’t know we existed at our location, and since many of them spoke Spanish, we’re hoping they will come back [the branch offers an extensive Spanish-language collection]…. You were very helpful in bridging our contact with them.”

Center for the Book

In the late 1990s, the Fairfax County Public Library established the first satellite Center for the Book in the U.S. to be affiliated with a state Center for the Book and the Library of Congress. The activities of the center celebrate the importance of books and reading in the community through literary events, author appearances, discussion series, seminars, and other programs and events related
to books and reading. Most of the programs are funded through partnerships with community organizations, businesses, and universities, as well as the Fairfax Library Foundation. The center is staffed by its director and her assistant.

Outreach is a significant part of the Center for the Book’s mission. One of its earliest efforts is Literature and Medicine, a facilitated book discussion group for health professionals, which began in 2002 and is cosponsored by Inova Health System. The group meets four times a year at Fairfax Hospital and includes physicians, nurses, social workers, physical therapists, and others who work for Inova. Books have included *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, and others that have themes of interest to those in the health field. Participants complete an evaluation after each session, which includes the question, “Did this discussion help you gain a new perspective that you can use in your professional life?” One respondent replied, “Always—an opportunity to learn through others’ experience is a wonderful way to grow, increase respect, and encourage openness and receptivity.”

One of the Center for the Book’s most successful initiatives is the Perspectives Series each spring, which brings in well-known authors and speakers in an effort to promote civic discourse in the community. The series is cosponsored by the library’s foundation and a local community center, which donates funds plus its 350-person theatre, and staffs each event. A local bookstore also provides copies of the speaker’s books, and each presentation is followed by a book signing. Well-known participants in the Perspectives Series include former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor; NBC correspondent Andrea Mitchell; mystery writer Sara Paretsky; Julian Bond, chair of the board of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); Marjane Satrapi, author of *Persepolis*; and many others. The series has attracted more than 3,000 attendees since 2004.

All Fairfax Reads

For the past five years, the library has organized All Fairfax Reads each spring. The one community/one book initiative is modeled on similar programs in other jurisdictions nationwide. The book is selected each year by a committee of library staffers and community members and chaired by the director of the Center for the Book. Adult programming is then planned around the book. The first title selected was *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee in 2004. The Center for the Book director organized fourteen programs around the book that year, including a reenactment of the novel’s trial scene in the City of Fairfax’s old courthouse. Promotional material included 1930s paper fans reminiscent of the book’s era.

The second year’s selection was *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, and the center was able to arrange an appearance by the author. Originally scheduled for a smaller venue, the program was moved to a local university’s theatre and attracted 2,100 attendees, many of whom watched from monitors in the lobby.

The overwhelming popularity of this author event was noted by Fairfax County’s Board of Supervisors’ chair, who introduced Hosseini and stayed for the event. Since then, he has been an avid supporter of All Fairfax Reads, writing a letter to the editor each year that is published in a newspaper such as the Washington Post. All Fairfax Reads thus reinforced the importance of reading and books to those county leaders responsible for funding, as well as connecting the community with authors.

Other All Fairfax Reads selections have included *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* by Dai Sijie; *His Excellency: George Washington* by Joseph Ellis during the 400th anniversary celebration of the settling of Jamestown; and the 2008 choice, *The Uncommon Reader* by Alan Bennett. Many of the All Fairfax Reads programs are presented in partnership with other organizations such as George Mason University, or in the case of *His Excellency: George Washington*, Mount Vernon, which is located in Fairfax County.

Fall for the Book

Speaking of partnerships with universities, for the past ten years, the Fairfax County Public Library has been involved in Fall for the Book, a literary festival organized by George Mason University and cosponsored by the library. The director of the Center for the Book serves on the organizing committee to help select participants. Some events are held in library branches; the library’s graphic artists design the program and promotional material; and the Fairfax Library Foundation funds the annual Fairfax Prize, a literary prize awarded each year. Michael Cunningham, author of *The Hours*, was the award recipient at the 2008 festival. Other participants at this year’s festival included Chinua Achebe, author of *Things Fall Apart*;
Sue Miller, author of bestselling novels including *While I Was Gone*; and the poet C. K. Williams, winner of the National Book Award.

**Changing Lives Through Literature**

One of the Center for the Book's most unusual partnership programs, Changing Lives Through Literature, began in 2007. It is an alternative sentencing program organized in collaboration with the Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Services and the Virginia Department of Corrections, Probation and Parole District 29.

The program is based on a model developed by the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth in 1991, but is one of only two similar programs in the U.S. that are designed and managed by a public library. It may be one of a few such programs that targets teen offenders, as well as adults.

Changing Lives Through Literature is an alternative to formal court action for Fairfax County offenders, using the power of literature to transform lives through reading and group discussion. The alternative sentencing program consists of a demanding book discussion group that meets over a series of weeks and involves reading, reflecting, sharing, and contact with stable members of the community and their values.

Each group consists of a facilitator, a probation or intake officer, and six to twelve offenders, all of whom must participate in discussions. Since 2007, FCPL and its partners have organized six groups: one adult women's group, three juvenile girls' groups, one juvenile boys' group, and one men's group. Some of the books selected include *Speak* by Laurie Anderson, *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelsen, poetry including "A Dream Deferred" by Langston Hughes, and *Hole in My Life* by Jack Gantos. The funding for books, journals, and a facilitator's fee are provided through gift funds to the library, either from Friends of the Library book sales, donations to the Fairfax Library Foundation, and grants.

The participating probation officers and court personnel are impressed with the success of the program and have asked for twenty-eight groups in the next fiscal year if funding could be found. The sessions have worked because each offender's opinion is valued and the participants have time to reflect on literature and life experiences. The discussions help offenders realize they are not alone in their feelings, and it gives them an opportunity to disagree with authority.

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Some of the comments from teenage girl offenders who participated in a group included, "I learned that I need to make better decisions, thinking them through more." Another said, "I learned that people are very similar in the basics." A third wrote, "Don't hold things in and let it build up. Speak to someone about it." Still another wrote, "I learned how things always prove themselves to be just not worth it and that people can change." A program such as this demonstrates that books and reading may offer life lessons to a population that might not have experienced the insights into life's complexities that books and reading offer.

**BookCast**

BookCast is a podcast project launched in the fall of 2006. The library was interested in experimenting with podcast technology and designed a series of interviews with local authors and more well-known program speakers with Library Director Sam Clay.

The project required several months of planning, but now that it has been established, the series runs smoothly and involves the library director and three staffers: a communications specialist who coordinates the program and edits the podcasts using a sound editing software program called Propaganda; a technical person who sets up the equipment for either an in-person or phone interview and processes the raw interview file; an Internet Services staffer who posts the podcast on podblaze.com, which includes adding the news feed, and creates the associated webpage files; and an audio technician who maintains the equipment. The interviews take place in a conference room and usually last fifteen to twenty minutes. Local authors are excited about the exposure, and we often interview authors who will be giving programs at a local library branch to promote their appearances. The authors in turn link from their websites to their interviews on the library's BookCast page. The library has also arranged phone podcast interviews with more well-known authors and speakers such as Alexander McCall Smith, author of *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency* series, and Julian Bond, civil rights activist and chair of the board of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Since the series began, the library has posted more than...
The director of the library’s Internet Services has worked with the Fairfax Library Foundation to solicit corporate sponsors to provide funds for the project, including additional bandwidth, which was required as more podcasts were added and the number of listeners increased. Over the past year, the number of BookCast downloads has increased 33 percent with a total of almost 12,000 since the project began. The BookCast series can be found at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/BookCast.

The system-wide initiatives mentioned above support more than 3,000 programs held each year in FCPL’s twenty-three branches. In addition to numerous programs for preschoolers and early readers, there are book discussion groups for grade-schoolers, teens, and adults; local author presentations; and much more. The key to our success has been actively recruiting partners in the community, whether nearby universities, other educational institutions, or businesses. Once the community is involved, making connections between readers and books becomes much easier.

In the era of the Kindle and Google’s book digitization project, there is much speculation in the media on the future of books and reading. Whatever form literature takes in the decades to come, a commentator in the Economist may have said it best: “Books are not primarily artefacts, nor necessarily vehicles for ideas. Rather, as Mr. Godin puts it, they are ‘souvenirs of the way we felt’ when we read something. That is something that people are likely to go on buying” (“The Future of Books: Not Bound by Anything,” March 22, 2007).

And, we might add, borrowing. Libraries exist in part to help people make such emotional connections with what they read. Reaching out to readers is a significant role for our institutions as the art of reading takes on new forms, but retains old meanings for its practitioners. ❖
Guidelines for Submissions to *Virginia Libraries*

1. *Virginia Libraries* seeks to publish articles and reviews of interest to the library community in Virginia. Articles reporting research, library programs and events, and opinion pieces are all considered for publication. Queries are encouraged. Brief announcements and press releases should be directed to the *VLA Newsletter*.

2. Please submit manuscripts via email as attachments in Microsoft Word, rich text, or plain text format. Articles should be double-spaced with any bibliographic notes occurring at the end of the article. Please avoid using the automatic note creation function provided by some word processing programs.

3. Articles in *Virginia Libraries* conform to the latest edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* and *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*. Accepted articles are subject to editing for style and clarity. Authors will be consulted on points of fact.

4. All articles submitted for consideration are reviewed by the editors and may be refereed by the editorial board. Articles that are not selected for publication will be returned within three months.

5. VLA holds the copyright on all articles published in *Virginia Libraries*. Contributors of articles receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears.

6. Illustrations are encouraged and should be submitted whenever appropriate to accompany a manuscript. Hard copy illustrations will be returned if requested in advance. Digital images should have a resolution of at least 300 dpi. Authors are responsible for securing legal permission to publish photographs and other illustrations.

7. Each contributor should provide a brief sketch of professional accomplishments of no more than fifty words that includes current title, affiliation, and email address. Unless specified otherwise, this information will be shared with readers of *Virginia Libraries*. Physical addresses should also be provided for the mailing of contributor’s copies.

8. Articles should generally fall within the range of 750-3,000 words. Please query the editors before submitting any work of greater length.

9. Email manuscripts and queries to Cy Dillon, cdillon@ferrum.edu, and Lyn C. A. Gardner, cgardner@hampton.gov. Please be sure to copy both editors.

10. *Virginia Libraries* is published quarterly. The deadlines for submission are: November 1 for Number 1, January/February/March; February 1 for Number 2, April/May/June; May 1 for Number 3, July/August/September; and August 1 for Number 4, October/November/December.
Science Fiction/Fantasy Book Group Encourages Reading and Provides a Social Hub

by Catherine Bond and Neil Hollands

On the evening of the third Tuesday of the month, members of the Williamsburg Area Science Fiction/Fantasy Book Group begin to gather at the James City County Library of the Williamsburg Regional Library. They take their time settling in. While exchanging greetings, members discuss the latest films, trade books or presents, give writing advice, debate politics and philosophy, start impromptu punning contests, or show off craft projects or collectibles. Tonight, the height of attention is on, of all things, a novelty that prompts a few questions and even more jokes. New faces are greeted, and those who have been away are welcomed back.

The group started in 2005, when a few survivors of a defunct chain-store book group contacted the Williamsburg Regional Library. Led by Bob Snare, they were looking primarily to advertise a new group and possibly to find a place to meet. Instead they found a sympathetic librarian who liked fantasy and science fiction and was looking to add a book group to the library’s outreach efforts and his own list of job functions. Using advertising at the library, contacts from the former group, and connections in local fandom, an opening meeting was cobbled together.

Three years later, the group is going strong. Most genre reading groups are small, often short-lived affairs, with just a few dedicated readers, but the Williamsburg group draws around twenty members each month from locations as far away as Richmond and Hampton. Most book groups are homogenous, with members from a common demographic of age, gender, and experience. At this group, ages run from college students to retirees; and while there are more men, the gender mix is nearly even. Members come from all walks of life: scientists, educators, and librarians mix with book sellers, technology experts, an ex-cop, and a smattering of part-time workers. Political beliefs run the gamut.

Even approaches to reading vary. Some members are hard-core bibliophiles. Some are dedicated to either fantasy or science fiction but dislike the other genre. Some prefer short stories, or graphic novels, or works published before 1980. A few members quietly prefer other genres. But most exciting of all, group participation has got some members to read BOOKS again. Prior to joining, their reading habit had dwindled to magazines, newspapers, or nothing at all, but now they make time to get through novels. They might not enjoy all of the books they encounter at the group, but find many titles they like or even love. They are introduced to authors they might not choose otherwise and find reasons to read books they always intended, but never found time, to read.

How does a big, shambling, digressive hodgepodge of a group survive? An important ingredient is the format. Instead of reading one common book, as most groups

Catherine Bond works at the Library of Virginia in Richmond as the federal documents librarian. Her favorite fantasy author is Charles de Lint. Email her at catherine.bond@lva.virginia.gov.

do, this group selects a monthly theme. Themes have included such far-flung topics as space opera, epic fantasy, vampires, apocalyptic novels, coming-of-age stories, romance crossovers, speculative fiction marketed as mainstream fiction, animals, and music. A librarian-created list of suggestions is distributed at the prior month’s meeting and also available online through Yahoo Groups (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wmsbrgsfbooks/). Members have to join the Yahoo Group to get the list online, but it’s free, and after that, any announcements, booklists, or other communications are sent directly via email. The backlog of past thematic lists is also available through the Yahoo site.

Members can select any book they feel embodies the theme. After an introduction to the topic—sometimes prepared, sometimes improvised—discussion proceeds around the table, with each attendee introducing the book they’ve read in about five minutes. This themed format requires patience. Digressions are frequent, because the tour through many different titles provides many inspirations for conversation, but the group has learned to enjoy them as much as the book talk. Members have very different tastes and don’t appreciate every book others discuss, but ultimately the variety is beneficial: it would be boring if everyone liked the same things. A diverse group like this would never agree on a common book, and most members would quit if assigned too often in the selection. Some would be embarrassed to attend if they hadn’t finished an assigned book. Others would dislike the confrontation that dis agreement about a single title creates. By using broad themes, none of the members’ favorite genres or formats, style preferences, or political beliefs need be neglected. Some members report on books they remember from the past; some read outside the monthly theme; and some simply listen to what the others have to say until next month. Because of the diversity in reading each month, the library or local bookstores don’t have to strain to find enough copies of a single title.

Members discover other books appropriate to their tastes over the course of a meeting and often go home with a new list of authors or titles to try. They learn about the history of science fiction and fantasy and about the styles of individual authors (and contribute their own knowledge to the discussion). One member reports that her friends in more conventional groups are curious about and even envious of the thematic approach.

The group also thrives on its commitment to openness and respect for others. Although it is an untrue cliché in some cases, many science fiction and fantasy readers will be quick to admit that they have awkward social skills. For most, however, the tradeoff is a sense of humor about themselves and appreciation of diversity and quirkiness in others. Members, particularly newcomers, have different levels of skill at presenting their books. Some need to be reminded not to give away too much with spoilers. Some need to be gently cut off when they go on too long, while others need to be drawn out with additional questions. Other groups could learn from the tact and gentleness with which needed suggestions are provided. Given patience and good examples, even the most awkward personalities and presentation techniques often improve dramatically within a few months. And while the two-hour time limit is continually tested, the group has never failed yet to make it around the table.

Members come to feel part of a group of lively, friendly people. They like to go someplace where people are happy to see them and to keep up with friends (some of whom they met through the group) when day-to-day schedules don’t permit other social interaction. The group includes several couples who like that they have found a shared activity. Birthday celebrations are fit into the meetings, as is news about members’ triumphs and tribulations in life. In December, we skip the book talk and spend the month enjoying a potluck dinner and playing thematic games.

Creativity flourishes in the group setting. Bud Webster, who makes a monthly trek from Richmond for the meeting, is the poetry editor for Helix: A Speculative Fiction Quarterly (http://www.helixsf.com) and has published his own stories and poems widely. He’s a font of information about book collecting, selling, and publishing in the speculative fiction world, and shares what he knows regularly with budding writers in the group. Neil Hollands, the group’s liaison with WRL, was inspired by what he learned each month to publish his first readers’ advisory title, Read On … Fantasy Fiction: Reading Lists for Every Taste with Libraries Unlimited in 2007. He’s working on a second title, a handbook for speculative fiction book groups. Jim Michie, another writer in the group, publishes a wide variety of stories, essays, and reviews online (http://jimmichie.com/).

Creativity in the group goes well beyond the written word. It’s not unusual for craft projects such as
beading, knitting, costuming, doll-making, and other needlework to appear at the meetings. Some of these works are sold professionally at Renaissance fairs and conventions, while others have been exhibited in local and national galleries and shows. Techniques are shared and discussed. The group also has graphic designers, historical reenactors, visual artists, and technical writers among its members, who share tips about their crafts, notices of upcoming events, and career advice.

The success of the group has expanded beyond monthly meetings. After each meeting, the group dines at a local Mexican restaurant, a perk that draws members in months when they don’t finish a book and includes spouses and friends who aren’t interested in speculative fiction. The group has become a social hub for its members, who meet weekly for coffee and small talk at a local bookstore or sample local restaurants together. Members often become part of a larger social group that joins together for parties and provides a good portion of the staff for a thriving local convention, MarsCon.

The group is an extended family, with its own dysfunctions and shared successes. Its membership is a microcosm of the larger community. Members get help with all kinds of tasks: finding a plumber, printing business cards, moving to a new apartment, finding a ride to the airport, or getting help in a time of illness. Book reviews, movie reviews, or restaurant recommendations are all shared with enthusiasm.

The benefits for Williamsburg Regional Library are considerable. The lists of books that fit each monthly theme don’t take much time to create and are reused for the library’s other readers. Knowledge gained while creating the lists and listening to group members is used to inform collection development, helping WRL’s speculative fiction collection to become exceptional. Group members create a solid base audience for this collection. Members of the group have become library volunteers, donating time to tasks such as shelving, shelf-reading, and presenting programs. They regularly donate books and purchase items from the Friends of the Library.

Contacts from the group led to a solid line of “Sci-Fi July” programming one year, including programs on model-making for film and television; a program on graphic novels; a science show featuring tricks with liquid nitrogen; and a program on Mars: half on its portrayal in fiction and film, and half with a NASA expert who had pictures of his latest work on the roving Mars landers.

Thematic book groups that focus on a particular genre, subject, or format are a winning outreach and programming choice. Other libraries could easily repeat the success of the Williamsburg Science Fiction and Fantasy Group. These groups are easy to manage and provide rewards far beyond the effort it takes to maintain them—rewards felt by participants and the library at large. Find your own communities of interest and consider starting one of these groups soon!

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The Library of Virginia: Start Your Affair with Books

by Jan Hathcock

For 175 years, the Library of Virginia (and its predecessors, the Virginia State Library and the Virginia State Library and Archives) has been known in the academic community as a center of research and scholarly discussion. Librarians and writers across the country knew that there was a priceless resource waiting for those well-skilled few who could access its treasures. In the past few years, however, the library has discovered another way, another path we can tread to reach out to new audiences.

We are demonstrating that the library is not just a place to research and write your book; it can be where you come to start your affair with books.

In the past few years, our halls have echoed with the laughter of children meeting storybook characters, with warm applause for a deftly turned phrase about Mr. Jefferson’s Women or Rhett Butler’s People, and with the percussive ring of Bob Carlin’s Virginia banjo.

For an old institution, one of the first state agencies created by the Commonwealth of Virginia, the transformation has been very quick. Many factors played a role, but the opportunity for such a shift occurred with the move to our new location on Broad Street in downtown Richmond. Finally, the library had not only the public spaces for programs but also free parking for visitors.

One of the first steps on this new path was to build on our commitment to preserving Virginia's history and heritage by honoring the contributions of Virginia writers. The Virginia Authors Room in our new building already was a magnet for visitors to the library. We knew that Virginia was home to legions of talented individuals whose books filled our collections and those of libraries around the state. We decided to initiate an annual award for the best writing by a Virginia author—or in the case of nonfiction, by a Virginian or on a Virginia topic.

The success of the 1st Annual Library of Virginia Awards Celebration Honoring Virginia Authors and Friends far exceeded our expectations. As renowned American Civil War historian James I. “Bud” Robertson, winner of the first nonfiction prize, said in accepting the award, “The award means so much more when it comes from your home state.” The prestige of these awards has grown through the years and has reinforced the Library of Virginia’s place in the preservation of our written heritage. New relationships with the literary community have been forged through the awards. Area book clubs routinely ask for the list of nominated books so they can make their reading selections. Publishers, authors, and readers eagerly submit nominations for the awards. Through the literary awards program, the public began to identify us with Virginia authors and literature.

With the literary awards we made the first steps toward a new image that built on the library’s mission, moving it from a place revered by a few to its current position as one of the most visited cultural sites in the metropolitan Richmond area.

How did we make such a major shift? In 2005, we realized that the Library of Virginia itself was a great asset in telling our story and reaching new audiences. We had marvelous space, so we began to plan for programs with a broader appeal that still maintained the strong connection to our mission and past. We began to solicit authors of fiction and poetry as well as respected nonfiction authors. Now we feature talks not just by histo-

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rians whose research offers fascinating and valuable insight into the lives of our founders or the aftermath of the civil war, but also writers with a more popular bent speaking about the first female pope or life as an award-winning broadcast journalist.

A key factor in our success has been the financial support of the Library of Virginia Foundation, which has allowed us to mount a targeted marketing program and stretch our advertising budget. Our foundation regularly communicates with donors about upcoming events. These efforts have resulted in greater attendance and enthusiasm for our programming. Visitors have the opportunity to hear an author speak and a chance to learn more about the Library of Virginia. Many become members of the foundation as a result of attending a book talk and signing up. More
than a few come back to visit our Virginia Shop or tour an exhibition. They come to take pride in the library and its outstanding collections and programs.

In 2004, there were 11 book talks at the Library of Virginia, attracting 528 visitors. Warren Billings, Catherine Clinton, Dean King, and Warren Hofstra were among the authors who discussed and signed their books at the library.

This year, in the first eight months, those numbers have blossomed to 24 book events, with more than 2,034 in attendance. Among the authors making appearances at the library in 2008 were Woody Holton, Larry Sabato, Tony Horwitz, Eleanor Herman, Gene Hackman, and Roger Mudd. These authors—building on the foundation of all the wonderful writers who helped us establish the book talk program—have attracted large and enthusiastic crowds. Now, publishers and authors are coming to us to hold book signings and launches. The library has truly become a stop on the literary map, not just for authors, but for book lovers as well.
The Danville Public Library Spreads Literacy, Reading, and Opportunity to Ex-Offenders

by Otis D. Alexander

Many ex-offenders feel that “the system” has little to offer them except a strong likelihood that they will return to prison. The high rate of recidivism among former offenders would seem to bear out this fear. However, the Danville Public Library (DPL) is doing all that it can to assist ex-offenders in reconnecting to their communities by spreading literacy, encouraging reading, and offering referrals to the many services that are available to help them. This is the primary reason that DPL has set up the Institute of Information Literacy: not just to benefit ex-offenders, but also to help the underserved community in general. It is the moral duty of the public library to ensure that all of its customers are afforded the best and most accurate information for their advancement.

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On August 11, 2008, as director of the Danville Public Library and creator of the library’s Institute of Information Literacy program, I was invited by Offender Transition Coordinator Charles B. Crumpler to speak at the Danville Adult Detention Center (City Farm). The fourteen inmates I addressed will be reentering the community within the next few months. After a warm welcome by the inmates, I shared information about the various services the public libraries have to offer throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. Many of these services are geared to the underserved, and a few are actually designed for the ex-offender.

In the commonwealth, a growing number of men and women with arrest and conviction records are reentering the employment market. To be sure, there are more than ten thousand who are released here annually. Some have been incarcerated in Virginia, while others relocate from other state institutions. These ex-offenders face numerous barriers in their search for jobs as well as other bias factors that impede their efforts to reenter the community. If they can gain employment, many of these ex-offenders will stay free from crime and not become recidivism statistics. To assist in solving some of these problems, my talk emphasized the information that one can obtain from reading, along with other related services provided by a public library.

Having previously compiled Getting It Together/Reentry for Virginia Employment: How to Get What You Want by Using the Public Library, I discussed this guide in detail with the inmates, describing the guide’s origins and how it seeks to both smooth their transition as they reenter communities in Virginia and steer them positively so that they will be successful and not continue to make similar choices to the ones they made prior to incarceration. I discussed decision-making, and how the decisions people make can lead them to poverty or plenty. I then asked them not to become victims of destiny, and to break the high recidivism rate that threatens the community.

Getting It Together is divided into three major sections. However, the meat of the publication is “Reentry and Virginia Employment.” This section provides guidance on obtaining vital documents like birth certificates; food stamps; Social Security cards; identification from the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles; Armed Forces/Military Personnel Records; high school, university, or GED transcripts or diplomas; and professional licenses. The section also provides help in creating a résumé or curriculum vitae, along with an abundance of information concerning health and wellness, free clinics and beaches in Virginia, transitional housing, cheap transportation, free legal aid in Virginia, and faith and philosophy. The appendices are very functional, as all of the resources can be found in the Danville Public Library as well as every library in the commonwealth.

Of course, the inmates’ eyes lit up when I talked about employment available in Virginia. I made it clear that no one was promising anything, I did highlight good interview techniques, encouraging my listeners to make sure that they are truthful, positive, and brief. Sure, they made mistakes. However, it’s important to let the employer or interviewer know how they will improve themselves. Falsification of an employment application is grounds for dismissal. A conviction does not automatically disqualify an applicant from employment.

This was my second visit to speak at the Danville Adult Detention Center. Because of these engagements and the need to assist ex-offenders in a community where the economy is not the best, I created a daylong workshop, Transition & Resources for the Underserved: Ex-Offenders, that will be held on September 22 to address some of these problems, from employment to recidivism. Speakers and programs will include the mayor of Danville, an Episcopal priest, the director of Adult and Continuing Education, staff from the Center for Volunteerism, the Basic Computer Application program at the Institute of Information Literacy (DPL), and librarians.

It sometimes appears to be difficult for our society to admit that it does not want to deal with ex-offenders. Also, it is hard for former inmates to gain decent employment, as many of the employers do not offer them a second chance. Ex-offenders lose the fundamental right to vote, and few are ever welcomed into our neighborhoods. While the public library is not an employment agency, it is committed to making sure that all community members have equal and professional resources available in a variety of media formats.
Promoting Library Services at Fintel Library (Roanoke College)

by Hany Hosny, Patricia Jean Powell, and Rebecca Heller

The renowned American Civil War historian and novelist Shelby Foote once said, “A university is just a group of buildings gathered around a library.” While Foote’s opinion is sure to be met with agreement and high-fives throughout the world of academic librarians, its validation can only come through the use of libraries by campus communities. Without use, college libraries are of no benefit to anyone.

Roanoke College’s Fintel Library considers promotion of the library to be an ongoing objective, not only because of the manner in which libraries’ resources and offerings evolve, but also because of the parallel evolution in faculty and students’ information needs. And that’s to say nothing of the four-year cycle during which student bodies are almost entirely recycled.

The objective of promoting the library, especially to students who might be intimidated or unfamiliar with the library’s offerings, needs to be ongoing. But how do you promote a service to someone who doesn’t come by to see what you have to offer?

Easy. Do what the corporate world does! Create a brand, advertise, and place your promotion tools in areas where your target audience is likely to be found. Then be ready to absorb the traffic and the increase in service requests that your success might create.

After considering the importance of a brand, Fintel Library created a logo and an accompanying slogan to be used on all promotional materials. These materials have included posters, bookmarks, newsletters, giveaways, a white board, etc. What follows is a brief summary of how each of these things is used to promote the campus library.

Giveaways

Everyone appreciates free stuff—especially if it is relevant to campus life. We’ve given away items such as breath mints, coffee mugs, and tri-colored highlighters to visitors who check out three or more items at our lending services desk. Ideally, the giveaway should be something that is used over and over in the presence of others who might be interested in getting their own free giveaways.

Newsletters

During the fall and spring semesters, the library puts out regular newsletters, promoting its services and attempting to project a laid-back, yet informative style of communication that will interest students. These newsletters are displayed on all floors of campus residence halls, sent to each and every faculty member in academic departments, and distributed at the lending services desk to anyone who checks out items or requests a newsletter. Features include new acquisitions, articles about the various electronic databases to which the library subscribes, library hours, employment opportunities, and general information about the library’s offerings.

Easy. Do what the corporate world does!

Posters

The library displays posters in various places on campus. The material they’re printed on, whether or not they’re framed, the dimensions at which they’re printed, and the locations in which they are displayed all depend on the specific nature of the posters.

By way of example, there are two posters displayed in this article. The “More time to play” poster

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Rebecca Heller serves as reference librarian for Fintel Library. Email her at rheller@roanoke.edu.
has been framed and displayed inside the library as well as in choice places in other campus locations so as to impart general information, bringing attention to all the services and benefits to be found at Fintel. The “Get out from behind the 8-ball” poster gets more widespread distribution, at smaller dimensions, and is displayed all over campus—from news boards to bathroom stall doors. It highlights a specific service (research assistance) and is displayed during the last half of academic semesters, when that service is in greater need.

Other tools of promotion include bookmarks, a white board displayed prominently at our lending services desk, occasional faculty newsletters, and a dedicated column on our webpage highlighting current happenings. Additionally, topics of interest are promoted using traditional book displays. One year, a book signing event was hosted by the library.

Book Displays

Back in the mid 1990s, Roanoke College faculty and staff brainstormed various ways to encourage informal academic conversations around the campus, both indoors and outside. We wanted to promote a learned atmosphere that extended beyond the classroom.

Fintel Library already had a “New Book” display just in front of the central staircase, as well as an online “New Book List” divided by academic area. To help encourage academic conversations, an additional book display to advertise campus lectures was begun on an informal basis; it is set up on a small round table closer to the front door and circulation counter. One of the reference librarians voluntarily checks the campus daily online Events Calendar during lulls in reference questions. She then chooses an upcoming event and prints out the announcement with time and place information; searches the catalog for ten to twelve relevant items (books, documents, or media); pulls the items from the shelves; selects the three to seven most visually appealing items; and places them and the Announcement printout on the table. The whole process takes about twenty minutes, usually split up into segments of five to ten minutes per step (depending on the level of traffic at the reference desk). Occasionally we also provide printouts of a more extensive bibliography on the display table, usually for larger lectures held in our gymnasium or auditorium.

Sometimes the special library display is prompted by a campus request. Our professors usually sponsor the lectures by visiting speakers, so a recent faculty request was for a display to help advertise a campus lecture by the visiting author of Hello Kitty: The Remarkable Story of Sanrio and the Billion Dollar Feline Phenomenon. Other talks by visiting speakers have included “Ethical Business in the Twenty-First Century,” “The Real 60s,” and “Substance of the Faith.” The RC Theatre also regularly asks for a display related to the current student production on campus. The theatre provides a large poster for the play and the library displays it with either a biography or collection of plays by the playwright, reviews of past productions of the play, or a DVD of professional performances of the play.

Another student “production” was featured this April when the 2008 issue of the campus literary magazine On Concept’s Edge appeared. Seven past issues, along with the brand-new issue, were displayed on the table, with book-
marks inside each one bearing the slogan “Check me out.” During a week when there are no lectures scheduled, we pick a topic of current or local interest. This academic year, during the week leading up to a lunar eclipse, we displayed our most recent astronomy book purchases alongside an article clipped from our local newspaper outlining the best time and spot to view the lunar display in Roanoke.

We just started keeping some statistics during March/April 2008 to see how many items are checked out from the special display table. When a library patron brings a book from the display to the circulation counter for checkout, the circulation attendant simply places the “Check me out” bookmark into a cardboard box. When the librarian takes down the current display, she collects any bookmarks in the box and tallies them up. We had ten displays during those months, featuring sixty-two books, two e-book printouts, seven DVDs, and one journal issue (the whole issue was devoted to the special topic). Six books and one DVD from the display were checked out. Anecdotally, several patrons stopped to look at the displays and thumb through the books; I often had to rearrange the items so that they were once again opened to the page that I wanted to feature for the display. In addition, one professor emailed to thank us and raved about the large crowd that had attended the lecture that we “advertised” with our special library display.

Book Signing Event

The history department on campus hosted a book-signing reception for one of the history professors, and a colleague and I attended. We enjoyed it so much that we wanted to host a similar event in the library for all faculty who had published books. This quickly expanded to include our Kandinsky Trio and Roanoke College Choir, both of whom have published CDs of their music. Planning began several months in advance of the date.

Family Weekend is held in the fall each year about five weeks into the semester. This seemed to be an ideal time to host the event, as more people would be on campus and we could piggyback on their publicity for the weekend. There are many activities scheduled beginning Friday evening and ending on Sunday. The event was scheduled for Friday afternoon from three to five p.m. on Family Weekend. We had a steady stream of people, including parents, students, and some staff.

Our event was included in the publicity for Family Weekend that was mailed to all parents/families of our students. The Resource Development Office, which coordinated Family Weekend, made a sign to place outside the front of the library. They also made nametags for the faculty. An ad announcing the event appeared in the Roanoke Times newspaper.
Participation from the faculty was solicited through our daily campus newsletter, the WebAnnouncer. The dean’s office and bookstore gave us book titles written by faculty. Despite our best efforts, though, some faculty still did not know about the call for participation. We accommodated several at the last minute with additional tables.

We have a fairly large open space near the entrance to the library, which we used to set up tables for the authors/faculty to sit at with stacks of their books. The tables were skirted and a tent sign on each table stated the author’s name and book/CD title. The refreshment table was also in this area.

The large reference desk/counter also near the entrance was used as the Roanoke College Bookstore cash register and storage area for additional copies of the books. The bookstore accepted cash, checks, or credit cards. A member of the bookstore staff ordered multiple copies of the books and CDs and provided nice pens for the signing. He and one assistant handled the money transactions on the day of the event.

We spent about $250 on refreshments, which included fruit and vegetable trays, cheese and crackers, nuts, bottled water, and punch. All were provided by our campus dining services, and the library staff enjoyed the leftovers the following week.

Textbooks to monographs to CDs. Religion, calculus, poetry, local history. The books and CDs represented were as varied as the faculty interests. The best sellers were the music CDs by the Kandinsky Trio and the Roanoke College choir and a monograph on the civil war. We received many positive comments from the faculty and attendees. The Kandinsky Trio music CD playing in the background helped to make it a lovely event. The event certainly highlighted the library during Family Weekend.

Academic libraries benefit from library promotion just as public libraries do. We want to encourage faculty and staff as well as students to learn more about speakers on campus, to stay current in their areas of interest, to relax with a recent film, and to connect with a real, hardback book once in awhile. While it’s not easy to quantitatively measure the effects of promoting the library to the campus community, our library staff is very confident that promotion of the library enhances the experience many people have at Roanoke College in their pursuit of information. We look forward to continuing to promote the library with innovation and enthusiasm.
Our Youngest Patrons: Early Childhood Literacy at Potomac Library

by Sarah Wright

The youth services staff of Potomac Library in Prince William County, Virginia, does programming for children in our community in order to encourage use of the library as well as develop literacy and a lifelong love of reading in our patrons. We have performers, storytellers, science enrichment programs, crafts, and story hours. One popular story program at Potomac Library is entitled “Book Babies.” This program is designed for parents and caregivers and their children ages six to twenty-four months. Together we learn about books, sing songs, act out finger plays, and play with puppets and toys. The program encourages important early childhood skills that lead to increased literacy in school-aged children.

Researchers of early literacy like those at the International Reading Association and National Association for Young Children recognize that literacy skills begin at birth. Each time parents communicate with their babies, the children experience language, and these experiences in early childhood encourage future reading skills. From birth, infants are able to distinguish all the sounds in human languages even though their speech may be limited to gurgling noises. Through communication with parents, their perceptions become limited to the native language they will grow to speak, read, and write. Early, or emergent, literacy is defined as what children know about reading before they actually read. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) of the National Institutes of Health has established six early literacy skills that help children develop the necessary skills to read. The NICHD has named these skills as print motivation, phonological awareness, vocabulary, narrative skills, print awareness, and letter knowledge.

Book Babies began at Potomac Library in response to the increase in promotion of early childhood literacy by the Library of Virginia and professional literature. Additionally, the patrons of Potomac Library were bringing children under the age of two to regularly scheduled toddler and family story times. The Children’s Department supervisor, Kimberly Knight, saw a program at Pasadena Public Library in California in which they passed a variety of board books out to families.

Sarah Wright is a youth services librarian who finished her MLS in 2007 at Catholic University. You may find Sarah explaining chemistry to young explorers and talking like a pirate at Potomac Library in Prince William County. Email swright@pwcgov.org.
with babies. This program gave the children an opportunity to hold and enjoy board books, but did not involve interaction between families. Each child got a variety of books to play with and read. When developing the Book Babies program at Potomac in 2005, it was decided to use one set of books with multiple copies and encourage interaction among the activity’s participants.

The Book Babies program at Potomac Library is a lap-sitting program. A youth services staff member leads a group of ten parents or caregivers and ten children. Each adult is given a bag with five board books, a song list, and an animal puppet. When we read stories together, the adult holds his or her child and reads along with the youth services staff. The materials used for this program, which include books, toys, animal puppets, and musical CDs, were provided by the Friends of the Potomac Library, and they are not a part of the circulating collection of the library. During the program, we also sing songs together with movement activities, and the children have a free period where they can play with provided toys. This play period allows children to explore interactive toys that encourage cognitive development while parents get time to converse about the lives of their children and shared experiences. The adults benefit from this social time, which can build community relationships for our library and the children that we serve. This free play period also provides a time for youth services staff to distribute fliers and booklists, describe upcoming family programs at the library, and share new concepts we have learned through literacy workshops. The program usually lasts half an hour.

Book Babies seeks to teach parents how to incorporate early literacy skills in play while having fun with reading board books. Phonological awareness, for example, is the ability to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words using activities that play with rhymes, words, sounds, and syllables. Phonemes are the smallest units constituting spoken language; English consists of about forty-one phonemes or sounds. Phonemes combine to form syllables and words. Most words consist of a blend of phonemes, such as the word go, which has two phonemes. In this word, two sounds are represented; the sound /g/ is represented by the letter g, and the sound /o/ is represented by the letter o. When reading to young children, parents can incorporate the recognition of phonemes. For example, parents often ask their babies, “What noise does the lion make?” The child will respond with a roar. This is one way to play with letters and the sounds that they make. Teaching children to manipulate the sounds in language helps them learn to read. We often make animal noises in Book Babies when we play with puppets or sing “Old MacDonald Had a Farm,” which employs lots of letters and animal sounds.

Print motivation can be defined as having an interest in and an enjoyment of books. All children in Book Babies sit on their parents’ laps, which creates a pleasant experience around reading. They learn that the library is a place where they can have time with books and fun with our staff. Young children respond to changes in the tone of voice and the rhythm of language when they are read to by adults. In Book Babies, children are engaged when parents ask questions and talk about the pictures in board books. Our Book Babies storytime is meaningful in the development of print motivation because children bond with their parents or
caregivers in a comfortable environment.

Board books are exceptional for increasing the skills of vocabulary (knowing the names of things) and narrative skills (the ability to describe things and tell stories). The books used in our program all make use of an assortment of words and have brightly colored pictures. For example, when reading the book *Toes, Ears, & Nose!*, parents lift the flap to tell the story. Parents read, “Inside my boots I’ve got …,” then flip a flap to reveal toes. The pictures have clothing that is brightly colored, including sunglasses decorated in vivid polka dots, neon pink, sunshine yellow, striped clothing, and flowery patterns. Books like this give the parent an opportunity to talk about different body parts using a variety of terms, thus increasing overall vocabulary. Parents may also identify diversity in the children portrayed in the book; describing pictures models narrative skills that the children will utilize once they become more versed in speech.

Print awareness is a skill imparted to children in the Book Babies program. This skill is the consciousness of print in the child’s environment. It encompasses knowing how to handle a book and understanding how the words flow on a page. Parents, caregivers, and staff in Book Babies model how to hold a book for the children, showing that they should keep the right side up, start with the first page and continue to the end, and read the left page first and then the right. This skill is paired with letter knowledge, knowing that letters are different from one another and that each letter is related to a certain sound. Letter knowledge and print awareness are practiced in Book Babies when adults run fingers under the words they are reading. According to the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, letter knowledge seems to be the strongest indicator of reading success.

Literacy is more than just being able to read; it represents the ability to understand written text, increased writing skills, and other creative activities. Children who will become successful readers tend to exhibit age-appropriate sensory, cognitive, and social skills in the preschool ages. Book Babies encourages cognitive development and socialization among the young children who attend. Through interaction and experiences, children become more adept with locomotion and engaging in imaginative play, which indirectly increases later literacy. Research clearly indicates that families and other community members are important in the effort to prevent children’s reading difficulties. As librarians and youth services staff, we can provide the tools for parents to ensure they are growing literacy in their children.

Notes


2. These skills are widely agreed upon thanks to a collaboration between the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the American Library Association called Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library. For more information: Association for Library Service to Children, “Every Child Ready to Read @


4. National Reading Panel, Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction (Bethesda: National Institute of Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health, 2000).

5. Ghoting.


Additional Resources


**Book Titles Included in the Book Babies Program**

Bauer, Marion Duane  
Boynton, Sandra  
Kunhardt, Dorothy Meserve  
Hill, Eric  
Hoban, Tana  
Katz, Karen  
London, Jonathan  
Oxenbury, Helen  
Taylor, Ann  
Watt, Fiona  
Wells, Rosemary  
Williams, Vera B.  
Wright, Blanche Fisher

Toes, Ears, & Nose! A Lift-the-Flap Book  
Blue Hat, Green Hat  
Moo, Baa, La La La  
Barnyard Dance  
Pat the Bunny  
Where’s Spot?  
Black on White  
White on Black  
Where is Baby’s Belly Button?  
Wiggle Waggle  
Clap Hands  
All Fall Down  
Tickle, Tickle  
Baby Dance  
That’s Not My Bunny  
Read to Your Bunny  
Only You  
“My More, More, More,” Said the Baby  
My First Real Mother Goose
The Virginia Writers Club: 
A Resource for and User of Libraries

by James W. Morrison

Founded in 1918, the Virginia Writers Club (VWC) is believed to be the oldest existing writers club in Virginia. It may also be the second oldest writers club in the United States. The VWC, its chapters, and its individual members are potential resources for libraries in Virginia. They are also friendly and grateful users of libraries.

The VWC is the only statewide writers club in Virginia serving writers of all genres. Clubs such as the Poetry Society of Virginia and the Virginia Romance Writers are limited by genre, and membership in clubs such as the James River Writers is concentrated in specific geographic areas. (Some members of the VWC are members of other clubs. The current president of the Poetry Society of Virginia, Patsy Anne Bickerstaff, is a past president of the VWC.)

When the club was first founded and for many years thereafter, its members and activities were concentrated in the Richmond area. Author James Branch Cabell served as the club’s first president. During his tenure from 1918–1921, the club met in his home in Richmond. Twenty-five other writers have served as president since Cabell. The last five presidents have resided in parts of Virginia other than Richmond, reflecting the geographic expansion of the club.

In the 1990s, the club began accepting local writers clubs as VWC chapters. To date, charters have been awarded to ten chapters: Blue Ridge Chapter (Charlottesville, Staunton, Waynesboro, and nine area counties); Chesapeake Bay Writers (Williamsburg, West Point, and twelve area counties); Hampton Roads Chapter (Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach); Hanover Writers (Hanover and two adjacent counties); James-York Chapter (York County, including Jamestown and Yorktown, along with Poquoson, Hampton, and Newport News); Northern Virginia Chapter (Arlington, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudon, and Prince William counties); Richmond Chapter (Richmond and surrounding areas, including Chesterfield, Henrico, and Hanover counties); Riverside Writers Chapter (Fredericksburg and the counties of Caroline, King George, Louisa, Spotsylvania, and Stafford, and portions of adjacent areas); Traveler Chapter (Chester, Colonial Heights, Emporia, Franklin, Hopewell, Petersburg, Smithfield, Suffolk, and thirteen area counties); and Valley Writers Chapter (Roanoke, Salem, Christiansburg, Fincastle, Radford, Rocky Mount, and area counties). The VWC is interested in establishing chapters in other areas of Virginia and will work with local writers’ groups to help them receive chapter charters.

The club’s objective is to support and stimulate the art and craft of writing, striving to:
• give writers opportunities for personal and professional association with other writers;
• strengthen skills in the art, craft, and business of writing;
• advocate the literary arts in the broader community; and
• serve as a statewide supporting and coordinating body to assist its chapters and members in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The VWC is open to all who are interested in writing and who support the objectives of the club. It is a nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) status under IRS rules.

The VWC and many of its chapters hold meetings in public libraries. In years past, the club has held

James W. Morrison, who is retired from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, has served on the VWC Board of Governors for ten years. He served as vice president for four years and as president in 2003–4. He is currently chair of the VWC Speakers Bureau and president of the Valley Writers Chapter. He also heads the Lake Writers at Smith Mountain Lake, where he lives. In addition to two books on international affairs published by the National Defense University, he is the author of Bedford Goes to War: The Heroic Story of a Small Virginia Community in World War II. From sixty nonfiction books nominated for the 2005 Library of Virginia Literary Awards, his book on Bedford, which was self-published, was selected as a finalist for a People’s Choice Award. He has given over fifteen presentations on his Bedford book at libraries in Virginia. He serves on the Franklin County Library Foundation Board, the library’s book festival planning committee, and the capital campaign committee for the branch library at Westlake.
its annual meeting at the Library of Virginia and at other libraries in the Richmond area. More recently, the annual meetings have been held at venues where meals can be readily served. At least four chapters hold their regular monthly meetings at libraries: the Hanover Writers meet at the Mechanicsville Library; the Northern Virginia Chapter at the Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library in Falls Church; the Riverside Writers Chapter at the Salem Church Library (or, during renovations, the Snow Library) in the Fredericksburg area; and the Traveler Chapter at the Enon Library in Chester. Other chapters meet regularly in bookstores, churches, or other venues.

Chapters vary in the conduct of their regular meetings. Most meet once a month; some, twice a month. Some meet to exchange information on writing opportunities and then let members read for ten minutes or so each and receive critiques from fellow writers. Others have guest speakers at their meetings. Some organize special critique groups by genre. Members of the public are generally welcome to attend one or more of these chapter meetings, particularly if they are interested in writing and possibly joining the chapter or VWC.

Several of the chapters have formed close associations with libraries and their staffs. Many chapters post notices, flyers, or brochures in local libraries to attract those interested in writing. Librarians often find it helpful to refer any patrons expressing interest in writing clubs and activities to the local chapter.

Some of the chapters present programs for the public at local libraries, including readings, workshops, and panel discussions. Individual members of the VWC have given presentations and conducted book signings at libraries. Some chapter members help organize and participate in annual book festivals at local libraries. The club maintains a Speakers Bureau list with details on a wide variety of writers who are willing to collaborate with libraries or community groups in presenting various types of programs.

The club holds quarterly, statewide meetings hosted on a rotating basis by the ten chapters. The quarterly meetings usually begin on a Saturday morning with a business meeting of the VWC Board of Governors and end with an afternoon program on writing, which is open to the public. Many of these quarterly meetings are held in libraries, and the afternoon programs may attract many people to the libraries.

The Valley Writers Chapter, based in Roanoke, may serve as a good example of collaboration between a chapter and libraries. In recent years, the chapter has held at least two writing workshops for the public at the Roanoke County Library Headquarters. One was on techniques of writing, and the other was on getting published. Chapter members have also done group and individual readings at libraries. Some chapter members have served on planning committees for book festivals at the Bedford County and Franklin County Libraries, and some have performed readings at these festivals. When it has been the Valley Writers turn to host a quarterly meeting of the VWC, it has held these meetings in libraries in Bedford and Roanoke Counties, with afternoon presentations open to the public.

The club’s annual luncheon meetings, usually held in November, have included in recent years guest speakers such as renowned Virginia authors David Baldacci, Sharyn McCrumb, Martin Clark, and Virginia Poet Laureates George Garrett and Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda. (Poet Laureate Garrett, recently deceased, and Laureate Joseph Awad have been active members of the club, and Baldacci, McCrumb, and Kreiter-Foronda are honorary members. Other well-known writers with Virginia connections who are or have been honorary members include Russell Baker, Annie Dillard, Earl Hammer Jr., William Styron, and Tom Wolfe.)

The VWC issues a quarterly newsletter called The Virginia Writer, sponsors writing contests, occasionally organizes writers conferences and workshops, and encourages and supports student writing through the Young Virginia Writers Club.

Club members range from associate members who have not yet published to seasoned writers with many publications. Some have publishers and some have self-published. Two of the most prolific members are L. B. Taylor Jr. of Williamsburg, who has had some twenty books published on ghosts in Virginia, and A. B. Feuer of Roanoke, who has had published a dozen or so books and over five hundred magazine articles on military history.

Several VWC members have participated as panelists in the annual Virginia Festival of the Book in Charlottesville, and the club usually has a welcome table at the festival.

To learn more about the VWC, visit the club’s website, www.virginiawritersclub.org. The website contains background on the club; news of upcoming events; membership and contact information; a Speakers Bureau list of members who are willing to speak, present programs, and do readings; information on chapters; and information on the Young Virginia Writers Club. The website also includes links to the chapters and to some individual members. Specific questions may be addressed to the author, James W. Morrison, at EZWriter@att.net or (540) 721-1991.
Honest Portrayals of Teen Suffering and Triumph: An Interview with Elizabeth Scott

by Chris Wiegard

Young adult author Elizabeth Scott lives in northern Virginia. She grew up in southern Virginia with two schoolteachers for parents, and spent lots of time at her local public library. After having worked several jobs that did not satisfy her, she is living her dream of writing books for young adults that speak to their life experiences. She notes that it is wonderful to be young, but not at all easy. Scott is the author of Bloom, Stealing Heaven, and Perfect You. Her newest title, published in September 2008, is Living Dead Girl, a harrowing tale that received starred reviews from Publishers Weekly and Booklist.

In a recent conversation, you expressed the thought that libraries are special to you because of your experience as a child and young adult reading the books of your local public library. Do you also see a special relationship between libraries and the people like yourself who create the books that go into them?

Well, I’m certainly grateful to librarians for all the sup-

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port they’ve shown me! And I do think that librarians and writers have something really important in common: a love of reading.

I have to say, however, that, for me at least, the heart of the library relationship lies between librarians and the communities they serve. They’re out there figuring out what their readers want to read, and then doing their best to provide it. It’s hard work, and in an age where budget cuts for libraries and schools are so common, it’s made even harder.

VL In your novels you write in the first person, taking on the identity of a teen girl. How do you prepare yourself to become a young adult character? How do you work at researching the realities and concerns of current teens?

ES I don’t really do anything special to prepare in terms of “becoming” a character because—for me at least—writing isn’t about that. I’m … hmm. It’s like I’m just the person who tells the story. I’m not in it; I’m just the means by which the story comes out.

I do try to keep up with what’s going on in the world, and with teens—not just because no one wants to read a painfully dated book, but also because no one wants to speak to someone who has no idea what’s going on!

VL In your novel Bloom, the girl who narrates the story loves the school library, but hides this secret even from her best friend. Do you see negative peer pressure as a real obstacle to libraries becoming relevant to young adults? How can librarians and authors overcome young adult resistance to leisure reading?

ES I don’t think it’s negative peer pressure toward libraries so much as an overall lack of interest in reading. And, to be brutally honest, I think it doesn’t help that schools tend to assign books that kids/teens simply don’t enjoy.

While I understand the value of reading the classics, and am certainly grateful to all my middle and high school teachers who got me reading Shakespeare, I do think that updating required reading lists to include modern books and books that touch on a wide variety of experiences is a good idea.

But more than that, I think the most important thing is just to encourage reading, period. I see so many people disparage certain kinds of popular books or authors, but you know what? Those books and authors appeal to readers. They want to read them. Shouldn’t we encourage that without judging? Isn’t the joy of reading about reading what you love? I hate to see readers put in a position where they are made to feel bad or “stupid” for what they enjoy reading.

VL In reading Bloom and Stealing Heaven, I sensed a common thread of young adults having to fight against adult expectations in order to become their true selves. I also felt that you portrayed growing up as potentially a really tough challenge for today’s teens. Do you feel that these aspects of growing up are particularly difficult today, or no different from the past?

ES I think “growing up” is a difficult process that hasn’t changed that much since I was a teen.

When you’re a teenager, you’re trapped in this strange world where you’re expected to make choices that will impact the rest of your life, but you’re also subject to the whims of other people. It’s a hard balancing act, and a frustrating one, too, because trying to figure out who you are is hard at any age. It’s even harder when you have all these expectations placed on you.

VL In the back of each of your novels, you state that you “firmly believe you can never own too many books.” Can we assume from this that you are resistant to the prospect of paper books being replaced by Amazon Kindle or other handheld devices?

ES I admit, I love books. I love the way they feel, the way they smell, and the solid weight of them. And I think that, at least for another generation or so, paper books will continue to be the norm. Past that … I don’t know. I actually do own a Kindle, and it’s fantastic because you can store a lot of books on it, which means that instead of taking twenty books with me on vacation, I can just pack my Kindle, which weighs less than a mass-market paperback! And I don’t find reading on it difficult at all.

Do I want paper books to vanish? No way! But do I think they might? Maybe. It depends, I think, on how younger readers take to the technology. If they embrace it, and clamor for it, I think it will happen.

VL Bloom is a story of first love and self-discovery. The lead character, Lauren, seems to experience a sexual milestone off-screen. Did realism compel you to write the story this way? In addressing the sexual selves of young adults, as you do here, is there ever external or internal pressure to moralize or to insert safe sex messages?

ES I feel really strongly about the way female sexuality is sometimes negatively portrayed...
in young adult literature, as if the choice to have sex means a teen girl will automatically ruin her life, get a disease, get pregnant, die, see someone she loves die, etc. I think that it’s not just unrealistic, but misogynistic. While I understand that some people want to wait until they are older or married to have sex, I think it’s important to show that teenagers—of both sexes—can and do think responsibly about sex.

As far as pressure to moralize—that’s not my place, and I know that when I was a teen, I greatly resented books/movies/people that told me how I should act/what I should do/think—and still do to this day. I write to tell stories, not to tell people how to think or live their lives.

VL I understand that you grew up in a very small community not far from Hopewell, Virginia. Do you think that literature, and particularly young adult literature, holds a special place in such rural communities?

ES Honestly? No. I knew so few readers growing up, in part because the county I lived in had no public libraries of its own, and in part because the county itself didn’t particularly encourage reading. (And the things we did read—well, they can be best described as ... antiquated.)

Having said that, I do think some rural areas do an excellent job of reaching young readers, and I applaud and envy those areas. Earlier this year, I had the privilege of meeting two librarians who work in very rural areas and was blown away by their dedication to getting kids and teens reading.

VL How do you relate to being a novelist? Do you sometimes feel, as other authors have said, that writing seems almost too fun to be something you get paid to do?

ES Sometimes it does feel like too much fun to be paid for! But then there are other times, like, say, when I’m rewriting a story for the fourth time; or trying to do two sets of edits because they’re both due in the same week; or have finished a first draft, printed it out, and am facing the daunting task of reading it over so I can rip it apart and try to make it better—well, those are the times when I’d much rather be cleaning my bathroom!

VL What is your mission as a writer?

ES I’ve never thought of having a mission in anything (though thinking back, having one might have come in handy during some of my previous jobs!), but I guess if I had to try and formulate something, it would be this: I’d like to write the very best stories I can.

VL Do you stay aware of what your “competition” in young adult literature is currently doing, or do you intentionally try to avoid knowing that?

ES Competition? I’ve never thought of it like that! I love all kinds of books, but young adult literature is my favorite and I definitely read it. I can’t read it while I’m working on a project, but whenever I have some downtime, I’ll grab a stack of young adult novels and indulge.■
Stories (and Poems) Live in My Head: An Interview with Claudia Emerson and Warren Rochelle

by Tom H. Ray

Claudia Emerson and Warren Rochelle are professors of English at the University of Mary Washington. They originally met while in the MFA Writing Program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Both of them have also worked in libraries.

Claudia Emerson was recently named the Poet Laureate of Virginia and in 2006 won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. She is the author of three volumes of poetry—Pharaoh, Pharaoh; Pinion: An Elegy; and Late Wife—all published by the Louisiana State University Press. She is also a contributing editor for the literary magazine Shenandoah. In her late twenties, she served as a branch librarian in Pittsylvania County.


I have known Warren Rochelle for a number of years, and a couple of years ago I met his friend and colleague Claudia Emerson. When the suggestion for doing interviews for Virginia Libraries came along, I realized I had never actually talked to them about their writing. The double interview was an experiment to see how two very different writers approach their craft and how it influences, or is influenced by, their careers as educators and their personal lives.

Getting away from it all? The act of writing can be its own disappearance....

My favorite part of the interview is the final section in which the authors wrote a “life as haiku.” I hope the interview encourages Virginia librarians to read these two very fine authors.

VL How did each of you come to the University of Mary Washington? Where do you go to get away from it all?

WR We both applied twice. The first time I applied, when I was in the waning days of my doctoral program at UNC Greensboro, was the second time Claudia applied, when the department was looking for a poet. The second time for me was in 2000, when I was teaching at Limestone College in Gaffney, SC, (home of the Giant Peach) and living in Spartanburg. I consider the SC years my years-in-exile. Claudia and I first met as scared thirty-something graduate students in the MFA program at UNC Greensboro. We never thought we would be teaching at the same school together or starting a new creative writing program there together.

Where do I go to get away from it all? Sometimes into a book, into a movie, into a story I am working on. I love the beach and the mountains. Art museums are escapes for me.

CE After I didn’t get the Mary Washington position the first time, I took a job as academic dean of Chatham Hall, a girls’ boarding school in my hometown. In 1997, my first year as dean, my first book, Pharaoh, Pharaoh, came out from Louisiana State University Press—and the following year the Mary Washington position came open again. I had been a finalist for the position the first time, and having a book just out from a good press helped secure the position when I applied again.

Getting away from it all? The act of writing can be its own disappearance, but my absolute favorite physical retreat is the Shenandoah National Park, only seventy miles from Fredericksburg. My husband and I love to hike. His band is

Tom H. Ray has been at the Library of Virginia for almost fifteen years. His current position is collection management coordinator.
called Stony Man after our favorite trail and mountain!

VL How does teaching writing or literature influence your own creativity and writing? Do you see a distinction between your teaching persona and your writing persona?

WR How does teaching writing and/or literature influence my own creativity and writing? Good question. I think one way is that I find myself more aware that I am doing what I tell my students to do—such as, for example, remembering the value of rich description and the particularity of detail, or practicing “show, don’t tell.” I also find I can use my own experiences as illustration. Just the other day a student in my Tolkien seminar asked if Tolkien set out to deliberately use his Catholicism in The Lord of the Rings. My answer: mostly no, but he did write out of the inescapable context of his life—and I used a similar example from my own life and my own fiction.

CE Teaching is also a creative act, and I have always found a wonderful dovetailing between my writing and an active engagement in others’ work.

My writing personality is my first nature—private, reflective, observant. I need a certain measure of solitude for creative and intellectual energy. I am what I call a “learned extrovert.” While I love the classroom, I had to learn the art of being on that particular stage. The challenge was to find an authentic public self that encouraged and welcomed students while reflecting the best of my private self.

VL What advice do you give students that you most often do not heed yourself?

WR Get more sleep!

CE I’ll echo Warren on that—and add exercise!

VL Librarians are the intended audience for this interview. How do you utilize the Mary Washington library or your public library? Do you have a favorite library story?

WR How do I utilize Simpson Library (UMW’s library)? I use the online catalog all the time, for such things as needed information for book orders, setting up a reserve list for a class, and directing students to resources beyond Google. I use the interlibrary loan service regularly. I use the library collection all the time for my academic and personal research. I schedule library research classes for my students every semester. I love our library and I love libraries!

Do I have a favorite library story? Maybe a favorite memory will do. When I started first grade my mother started taking me to the
Chapel Hill Public Library, which in the early 1960s was in an old, crowded white house on Franklin Street downtown. Supposedly this house used to be owned by a Mrs. Green who ran a business of ill repute on the premises. The house was jammed, packed, stuffed with books, books, books, and books. Books were crammed into the bathroom—I swear I remember them lined on the top of the toilet tank—on the creaking stairs, and just about every space that could be made into a shelf. The floors creaked, too. Having learned in first grade to write “1-M” on the checkout card, I carefully did the same thing at the public library. In a way, I grew up in the Chapel Hill Public Library (the white house and its successors).

I also use the online resources all the time—and while I adore my 1930s-era Webster’s, I also haunt the Oxford English Dictionary online. We also have the best reference librarian in the world in Jack Bales—an accomplished author himself!

Like Warren, I grew up going to the library—and then in my late twenties was hired to be a Pittsylvania County branch librarian in what was then a little two-room former schoolhouse of a library in Gretna, Virginia. We were open four afternoons a week, and my assistant was an eighty-year-old delight of a woman named Alma Gay. We loved our patrons and each other—and had many joyful afternoons!

If you were not in an academic environment, where do you think you’d be?

I think I’d be working in a bookstore. I grew up browsing in the Intimate Bookshop, also on Franklin Street, next door to the Varsity Theatre. It was a sad day when the original store burned, and a sadder day when they went out of business.

By the way, I was a school librarian for eleven years before going back to graduate school at UNC Greensboro. I worked in North Carolina in public and private schools and for two years overseas in Cartagena, Colombia.

I have a diverse list of what I call “missed professions”: librarian, veterinarian, park ranger, ornithologist, and environmental scientist/activist top the list!

Why do you write? Putting aside the fun of having a “name in print” or the need for tenure—why, personally, do you write?

Having your name in print isn’t just fun; it is a major rush.

Having your name in print isn’t just fun; it is a major rush. Why do I write? It is a matter of self: this is who I am. If I don’t write regularly I find myself feeling out of phase, or out of sync, with the universe. Everything is askew and just not quite right.

I have long known the truth that despite a fifteen-year career in the academy, I don’t think of what I write as something “academic.” Poetry is a primary lens on the world for me; I would write poetry even if I were in one of those other professions I listed earlier.

How do you characterize your work? What have been the defining moments thus far in your life as a writer?

I would characterize my creative work as science fiction and fantasy. A defining moment? When I sold my first short story, “A Peaceful Heart,” to Aboriginal Science Fiction for real money. When I received the first copies of my first novel, The Wild Boy. When I read a review in which the reviewer really gets the book.

My book projects have changed over time, but so far I have written poetry almost exclusively. Defining moments? Getting into graduate school in poetry at UNC-G after being out of school for a decade; having Dave Smith call me asking if he could publish my first book with his signature series Southern Messenger Poets through Louisiana State University Press, the press I had always dreamed of joining; being invited to read at the Library of Congress; being named Poet Laureate of Virginia; and, of course, being awarded the Pulitzer Prize for my third book was just thrilling.

Is writing for you a collaborative or solitary activity? Do you have a muse (real or imagined?); another inspiration; or a “wall” off which to bounce ideas and drafts?

Writing, for me, is both collaborative and solitary. I have an established reader-exchange relationship with a friend I met in grad school, and we exchange and critique each other’s work on a regular basis. I have a second reader here in Fredericksburg, and we do the same thing for each other. Both of these reader-friends have been godsend. For muses, I have a dear friend in Atlanta, whom I have known since high school, who is something of a wall for bouncing off ideas and drafts as well. Some literary muses include Ursula K. Le Guin, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Robin McKinley, William Faulkner, Madeleine L’Engle, Julian May ...

The act of writing poetry is a solitary one for me, though I do like to “talk out” ideas with friends and my husband. I also have trusted first readers in Betty Adcock, my mentor and friend;
and R. T. Smith, who is a wonderful poet and fiction writer and editor of Shenandoah, the Washington and Lee University Review.

V L In this age of PCs, spell check, and print-on-demand publishing, what is your relationship with an editor?

W R While I have met my editor, Gary Turner at Golden Gryphon Press, only once, I feel, thanks to email, we have a friendly and supportive relationship.

C E I have a wonderful book editor in Dave Smith—and he has throughout all of the changing book projects offered sound feedback just before publication. LSU also has superb copyeditors who help me hone the books.

V L Can you remember the first thing you wrote? How has your writing voice changed since then?

W R The first thing I ever wrote? Good Lord, I have written stories since I could write; and before that (and after), I drew stories on the backs of used typing paper my mother would bring home from her job as a secretary at Duke University. I remember writing in third grade, after reading The Chronicles of Narnia, a very bad imitation with a High Queen as opposed to a High King. A myth explaining the seasons that I wrote in sixth grade sticks in my head. Clearly I wrote a lot of fantasy, even as a child. My writing voice has grown up, or rather it has become more real and authentic and honest and less imitative.

C E While I wrote some poems and songs in high school and college, I also initially wrote short stories. My voice has changed completely, though I still value the natural world for its metaphorical riches—and I have done that all my life.

V L Are there other types of writing you would like to try? Are there things in your writing closet that may never see the light of day?

W R I wrote a science fiction play—set on another planet—that is absolutely awful. I hope no one ever sees it. The novel I wrote my senior year at Carolina was deep and profound and hastily.

Other types of writing? The personal essay is one in which I am especially interested.

I feel almost a physical urgency and a certain excitement that I must write this poem.

C E I’d like to try the essay and one day a novel perhaps.

There are countless drafts of poems I abandoned along the way, trying to write my way to the “keepers.”

V L What kinds of books, articles, or authors do you read for enjoyment? What authors or genres most challenge you?

W R For enjoyment: science fiction, fantasy, memoir, travel, personal essays, and mainstream novels.

Authors that challenge me: the first one to come to mind is Eckhart Tolle and his book A New Earth.

C E I love a good novel and am an intermittent fan of biography. I also read a lot of science writers. If by “challenging” you mean “difficult to get into,” I’ll say poetry that has as its purpose an experiment that is more important than any meaning.

V L Career-wise and personally, where do you want to be when you are sixty?

W R When I am sixty—which isn’t as far away as I would like to think, sigh—I would like for our creative writing concentration to be a program with a functioning director, a national reputation, and a secure and safe budget. I hope to have a few more books published, and I would like to be better known for my work. Personally, a bigger house.

C E I echo Warren that by the time I am sixty I’d like to see this program nationally recognized, vital, and filled with eager, talented students. In my writing life, I hope for two more books, at least (I am fifty-one). In my personal life, I hope to nurture the great happiness I have in my marriage and help my husband Kent further his music.

C E Do you have any questions for each other?

W R How do you know a poem is coming?

C E I feel almost a physical urgency and a certain excitement that I must write this poem. My process can be slow—months of mulling over an idea and taking notes—but once I feel ready to write, the actual composition can be days long and all-consuming.

V L Do you miss your characters when you’re done with a book or story?

W R Yes, I do. I have found myself wondering what happened to them next or how things turned out, which, in the case of Harvest of Changelings, has led to a sequel. I found Gavin, the protagonist of my short story “The Golden Boy,” so interesting that I wrote a (still unpublished) novel, which gave me a lot more room to explore Gavin’s world and his character. Missing them doesn’t always mean another story, but I do find myself
I feel them, as Virginia Woolf said, expectant and heavy.

Stories live in my head, and I live, at least part-time, in there with them. They gather weight, until finally there is enough for the words to stay anchored to a page. I feel them, as Virginia Woolf said, expectant and heavy. Sometimes an impulse to read seems to connect to this expectant story, to the story already in process. Here, read this, this is what your imagination needs now to go on, for the story to flower as it must. I write because I have to. Fairy tales are true.

CE

My mother would not tolerate boredom in me, claiming that my boredom would say more about me than whatever I might be complaining about. From this, I learned to pay closer attention to everything, and to have confidence enough to look at a bird, a spider, anything, as though no one had ever seen the world the way I might. Poetry is the highest ordering of language, and I have found in that intensity a medium through which I can fuse the world with my inner landscape and make meaning from the chaos of abstract emotion.

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An Orange Line Train to Ballston

by Ann Friedman

Ballston is a stop on the Metro in Arlington. It used to be the end of the line, but no more. The Metro network now snakes into Fairfax County to its new terminus at the exotically named Vienna station. More than twenty thousand mostly anonymous people come and go through the Ballston station every day. The calming recorded voice soothes the passengers as the train moves from stop to stop: “This is an Orange Line train to Ballston.”

“An Orange Line Train to Ballston”1 is also a short story by Edward P. Jones, and therein lies my tale. The main character in the story is a lonely single mother who rides the train with her children every day. On one of these trips, her children are fascinated by a man with dreadlocks, or “snake hair,” as the children familiarly call out. The man appears several mornings, always engaging the children, but then disappears, leaving only a memory of the dreadlocks—and the mother’s loneliness.

Alice and I have been reading this short story for several months. We meet in the public library near Ballston to tackle reading. It is a contact sport. We each read a section; I help when the reading gets too hard. If too many words are unfamiliar and need to be sounded out, we begin to lose touch with the story. It just becomes a reading exercise, and that is not good. Alice wants to immerse herself in the people’s lives, not sound out words. After one particularly frustrating session, Alice stopped and looked up at me: “You have read all your life.” The impact these words had on me was immediate. I take my ability to read for granted. I never think of the privileges it has afforded me all my life.

Alice wants to immerse herself in the people’s lives, not sound out words.

Alice is an adult, a single parent, and a beginning reader; her whole life is hard work. In two years of tutoring we have progressed, but very slowly. Alice is now a more confident reader, but not a fluent one. She is still not able to keep a job that requires basic literacy skills that can be consistently applied in the pressure of a customer service environment. And customer service, of course, is where the jobs are. Why is progress so hard? Life gets in the way: children with needs and homework that is hard to decipher, low-paying jobs that come and go, disruptive relationships, poverty—and the list goes on. Until her reading skills get to the fifth- or sixth-grade level and she can combine them with basic math skills and computer literacy, poor-paying jobs with not enough hours to meet expenses are all she can expect. In this world of eco-

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nomic realities, there is very little to feed Alice's spirit, and very little time for stories.

Alice’s dilemma is emblematic of a very real Virginia crisis: more than two million adults are not ready for GED programs, or in many cases for classroom settings. These Virginia adults struggle with basic or below basic literacy skills:

- Unless solutions can be found to help these adults raise their literacy levels, a majority of them will spend their lives mired in economic uncertainty, with a disproportionate number living below the poverty level, incarcerated, or unable to access vital health care and community services.

- Many of these individuals are recent immigrants who may not be literate in their native languages. Given the demographics, particularly in northern Virginia, the implications for society are frightening:

  - Illiterate adults are often the product of an intergenerational cycle of illiteracy, and unless they seek help in an adult education or literacy program, they will pass their poor literacy skills down to their children.

  - Whatever the solution, this low literacy challenge needs to be comprehensively addressed. At best, wrap-around services would exist to assist individuals with the multiple issues of poverty in a coordinated way; but if that is not possible, good community-based education programs that meet student needs when and where they can access them should be provided. The quality of life for many adults, the future of their children, the strength and resilience of our communities, and the viability of the economy are at stake:

A 1997 study by University’s Weldon Center surveyed 564 Virginia employers about entry-level positions and requirements for individuals without a four-year college degree. The study found that “in today’s job market, people who cannot read and do basic math are hired only into the least-desirable jobs—those with low pay and no hope of promotion. Moreover, the required level of literacy is increasing in almost every job.”

Most would agree that the situation has not improved in the ten years since the study.

The quality of life for many adults, the future of their children, the strength and resilience of our communities, and the viability of the economy are at stake....

Public libraries have always responded to crises in the community with a can-do attitude. Libraries continue to be part of the solution to the literacy crisis. Just as public transportation networks such as the Metro must be strong for a healthy community, so too must the literacy support network. What twelve things can public libraries do to strengthen the network and contribute to the solution?

1. Strengthen the public library’s role in the local community literacy network. Persons with low literacy skills can easily appear faceless to the library community. However, most public library mission statements speak of serving all residents, not just those who read. The public library voice supporting literacy councils, literacy efforts in faith-based communities, citizenship initiatives, and adult education must be heard loud, clear, and often in the community and in government circles.

2. Advocate with other organizations in the network for additional funding for adult education. Virginia spends $2.6 million annually on literacy initiatives—mostly in oversight and assessment. Only $200–250 thousand is spent on direct aid to student services. Literacy organizations must raise most of their funding from local governments and from private and corporate donations and grants. The amount of state funding and the imbalance between spending on oversight and direct aid to student services must be corrected. The leadership for such changes will not come from the government. Advocacy groups, particularly coalitions, must make the case and demand change from the government.

3. Train all professional and paraprofessional staff to help low-literate and limited English speakers find needed information. These groups will continue to require help in finding accurate information. Their skills can remain tentative for a long period of time during which families grow, government services are needed, medical information for aging parents would help, and other life issues demand accurate information not easily accessible for them.

4. Place literacy materials (for tutors, students, and library browsers) in every library collection. The collections do not need to be large. Even ten to twenty-five titles can make a difference. However, the items do need to be available...
and cared for. The collection needs good placement in the library and good signage. And the library staff needs to know about the collection—and why it is important. (A basic collection list is available from the author of this article.)

5. Reconsider library policies, if necessary, on the use of meeting rooms for classes and the use of public space for tutoring. Many libraries do not allow their meeting rooms to be used for classes and discourage the conversations that take place during tutoring from occurring in public space. If raising the literacy level in our communities is a priority, exceptions and accommodations should be considered. The woman who insists on total silence so she can read her newspaper may have to find another space so tutoring can happen.

6. Support and strengthen family story hour programs—including bilingual offerings, if at all possible. For many parents with low literacy skills, there is little understanding of the vital role of a parent as the child’s first teacher and educator. The family story hour is often the first step to understanding, as well as the first step out of the family illiteracy quagmire. Wanting to help your children is a powerful motivator.

7. Start a conversation club. These clubs, usually run by volunteers, allow people whose English is emerging to come together in a safe environment to practice speaking in English. One leader gives students lists of slang, idioms, and other odd words. Talking about phrases such as “break a leg” or “go fly a kite” provides interesting conversation and enables immigrant learners to be more “with it” in their American speech. (For more information on volunteer-based conversation clubs, email Jane Larsen, jtlhal@aol.com.)

8. Integrate literacy instruction into computer lab classes. Computer literacy is as essential as reading skills in today’s workplace. However, teaching low literacy adults how to use a computer requires patience and a basic understanding of the learning challenges these students face. Consider partnering with a literacy or other provider with skills in this area to offer classes or individual tutoring.

9. Start a book club with Adult Education for their ESOL classes. Often the Friends of the Library will be glad to welcome new readers and will purchase at least one book for each student to keep and own, often a first for the student. One or two discussion sessions and a tour of the library may be all that is needed to make the students library users for life.

10. Set aside one or two computers and dedicate them to language learning. Literacy students frequently find it hard to compete with the rough and tumble of the public computer sign-up process. Software for learning languages, such as Rosetta Stone (www.rosettastone.com) and Oxford Picture Dictionary (interactive on CD-ROM), as well as programs for learning to read, such as IBM’s Reading Companion (www.readingcompanion.org), offered by IBM as a philanthropic grant, can stimulate interest and offer much-needed repetitive practice. An umbrella organization such as the Library of Virginia might consider seeking a Reading Companion license from IBM for all public libraries in the state.

11. Recruit volunteers for literacy organizations. There is no better place than the public library to recruit volunteer tutors and classroom assistants. Making literacy a priority among public library customers will make a difference.

12. Be vigilant about the reading level of critical public documents, particularly local and state documents. The Virginia Driver’s Manual (http://www.dmv.state.va.us/webdoc/pdf/manual/manual.pdf), another gateway to participating productively in the workforce, is substantially written at the twelfth-grade reading level, when the sixth-grade level should be the target. When this was called to the DMV’s attention, they admitted that they did not consider the reading level when producing the manual. To their credit, they have undertaken a major rewrite. Call the government to task when the reading level is too advanced for many of the people who must use and understand the information.

The “why” of this discussion should not be lost. Alice needs to learn to read better to be able to access and interpret information for day-to-day life issues and get a better job. She also wants to grow as a person. She loved The Women of Brewster Place and identified with the lonely mother who longed for adult human touch in “An Orange Line Train to Ballston.” The experience of human consecutiveness.
and its absence in the story made Alice feel less alienated and alone. Libraries are about information and stories and connections to the larger community. As public librarians, we must work with our network partners to see that everyone has the tools to make the connections.

Libraries have always felt a connection to literacy efforts, but somehow our voice in support of universal basic literacy has become muted in Virginia in recent years. We have pursued connections and networks perceived to be more glamorous and financially rewarding. Not all these efforts have been sustainable or even rewarding. Strong public support for basic literacy and immigrant learners will never make libraries rich, but it will make us a significant contributing partner in the solution of a major crisis in Virginia. Being a partner in finding and implementing solutions for community problems is where libraries have always done their best work.

Notes:
3. Ibid, 15.
4. Ibid, 18.
5. The Reading Companion provided through a philanthropic grant from IBM is used in the basic literacy programs of the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia (info@lcnv.org). The program is also available in the Language Lab at the Arlington Central Library.

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ISBN: 978-0-615-25651-1
The Chesapeake Poetry Festival

by Jean Carideo and Phyllis Schirle

For the last sixteen years, Russell Memorial Library has been the home of the Chesapeake Poetry Festival. The first festival, held in 1993, was the result of a casual conversation between Norfolk attorney C. Edward “Eddie” Russell Jr. and Chesapeake Public Library Director Margaret “Peggy” Stillman. The idea began when Russell was taking a class in poetry at Virginia Commonwealth University taught by his longtime friend and Poet Laureate of Portsmouth Dave Smith. Russell asked Stillman if she thought holding a poetry workshop in a public library might be interesting and if Dave Smith could help. Not one to miss an opportunity (or a beat), Stillman enthusiastically agreed. With Russell and Smith helping, she began planning what would become an annual event. The Chesapeake Poetry Festival was introduced to the community as a celebration of the richness of Virginia’s regionally, nationally, and internationally known poets, presented through poetry readings and workshops.

The Chesapeake Poetry Festival was a first: never before in a public library in Virginia had there been such a gathering of poets to celebrate each other’s accomplishments as writers and to enjoy the sharing of ideas, feelings, and the power of poetry with the community at large. Due to Smith’s network of friends and colleagues and his strength as a nationally known writer, twenty poets traveled to Russell Memorial Library for an intense weekend of public workshops, readings, and receptions.

George Garrett, Ellen Voight, Larry Levis, and Charles Wright were among those who came to hear, speak, and learn from each other. A diverse audience from all over Virginia responded well to this comfortable and open setting. Participants spent hours after the readings in small, informal group discussions and lively exchanges.

The second year of the festival brought together thirteen Virginia poets to participate in workshops and poetry readings (an ice storm prevented eight others from attending). The format was designed to confirm the value of poetry as it relates to human-kind and to encourage a dialogue between the poets and the community. Workshop topics ranged from exploration of the black writer in the South, with the opportunity to debate the perception of progress made, to poets exploring their own work and critiquing the work of participants. Once again the event was a huge success, drawing in people from all over the region.

Twenty-three Virginia poets gathered for the Chesapeake Public Library Poetry Festival in 1995. The festival was attracting quite a following. Over 600 patrons attended this third festival, which continued the celebration of poetry and poets with Virginia connections. Poetry readings were held on Friday afternoon and evening; two workshops were offered Saturday morning; and readings continued throughout Saturday afternoon and evening. All of the poetry readings were well-attended. The poets were available for individual discussions throughout the two days and spent a great deal of time talking with the patrons and each other.

The two workshops offered were both standing room only. “Writing at Home: The Personal Writing Experience,” chaired by Betty Adcock and Elizabeth Seidel Morgan, offered suggestions and exercises for participants to sustain year-round writing activities outside structured environments. “Publishing in Literary Magazines” was a panel discussion led by Dave Smith (The Southern Review); Margaret Gibson and Mary Flinn (New Virginia Review); Judy Longley (Iris);

Jean Carideo is manager of Russell Memorial Library.

Phyllis Schirle serves as special programs coordinator for the Chesapeake Public Library System.
“Whenever I read a modern poem, it’s like my brother has his foot on the back of my neck in the swimming pool.”

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

Top, Gregory Orr; above, Jon Pineda

and Henry Hart (Verse). While encouraging aspiring writers not to give up, they offered a candid look at what editors like and don’t like.

An interesting side note about the 1995 festival: The staff received a call in 2002 from an up-and-coming young poet named Jon Pineda. He had recently won his first national poetry prize, the Crab Orchard Award, and he wanted to see how he could contribute to the Chesapeake Poetry Festival. He had attended the festival in 1995, right at the time he was applying for the MFA program at VCU. He told the staff he couldn’t believe his good fortune in getting to meet the very poets he had been studying the past year at—the library. He has since become an integral part of the event, conducting teen workshops and editing the teen poetry journal.

Unfortunately, the Chesapeake Poetry Festival, with so many stellar poets gathered for two days, was becoming more and more difficult to arrange. Funding was limited and the poets received only the bare minimum for travel and lodging. They participated out of a love for poetry and a strong friendship with Dave Smith. Most of the poets were also college professors; the varied class schedules for the schools were preventing many of them from making a commitment to continue. The festival took a hiatus in 1996, bypassing the gathering until 1997, in order to hold
a planning session and make a change in the format.

In Poetry 180: A Poem a Day for American High Schools, Billy Collins, America’s Poetry Laureate in 2003, suggests to young people the notion that poetry can be a part of everyday life as well as a subject to be studied in the classroom, “because all too often high school is the place where poetry goes to die.” With this in mind, the planning committee made the decision in 1997 to host two featured poets each year in order to include appearances at two Chesapeake high schools along with public readings. The event included poetry workshops at the library with local poets and an open mike night for the public as the finale. This format not only allowed us to gain a stronger focus for our publicity and highlight the creative talents of two poets, but also enabled us to take nationally known poets and poetry into Chesapeake’s public high schools. The high school appearances (each year for the last thirteen years) continue to be among the most rewarding and illuminating experiences of the entire festival.

By focusing on two featured poets, it became possible for us, with the support of the Chesapeake Public Library Foundation, the Friends of the Chesapeake Public Library, the Chesapeake Fine Arts Commission, and the Writers in Virginia program, to offer honorariums and travel expenses and to host a reception before the public readings. This financial support also made possible the purchase of fifty copies of each visiting poet’s books for students and teachers to study before the school visits and keep as mementos of the event.

How We Do It

In the interest of full disclosure, putting on a poetry festival of this scale, with limited staff and space, is not easy. The planning and execution of each year’s festival is done by four staff members who are also juggling their daily responsibilities in the library. Planning starts soon after the end of each festival: poets are considered, selected, and invited; schools are chosen; grants are written; and the publicity and logistics of the receptions and events are discussed. The continued success of this event is directly attributed to the fact that these employees are the same seasoned folks who have worked together for years. They approach each and every year the same way—with the attitude that this will be the best poetry festival the
Chesapeake Public Library has ever presented.

As the saying goes, “There is no constant but change,” so the festival expanded again in 2005. We added a poetry writing workshop for teens; a teen-only open mike night; and Café Russell, an evening of poetry for middle school students and their families (winner of the 2006 Virginia Public Library Director’s Award for Best Children’s Program). *FONT*, a literary journal dedicated to featuring poetry by high school students currently residing in Chesapeake, debuted in 2007. The brainchild of award-winning local poet Jon Pineda, *FONT* was recognized by the *Virginian-Pilot* as contributing to the richness of our cultural community in 2007. For 2009, we are considering the phenomenon of Poetry Slams and the possibility of holding events throughout the system, rather than hosting everything at one location.

**A Charged Atmosphere**

From the beginning, our goal was to bring poetry into the realm of public recognition and to encourage anyone who was interested in writing poetry. As most literary festivals are held at universities or schools, people who may be reluctant to go to a poetry event at a college have an entirely different feeling about an event at a public library. Comments from partici-
pants over the years have proven this to be true. The informal setting allows both the poets and the audience to simply experience the joy of reading, of hearing their works as pure expressions of the art of poetry. The public has the opportunity to interact with those who have made poetry their life’s work; the poets are able to share their poems without the competitiveness of the academic environment.

One comment heard year after year concerns the caliber of the festival’s featured poets. Since the initial festival in 1993, Chesapeake Public Library has hosted four Pulitzer Prize winners—Henry S. Taylor, Charles Wright, Claudia Emerson, and Natasha Trethewey—and forty-two nationally known and published professionals, many of whom are chairs of major university English departments. This coming together of poets creates a charged atmosphere, which adds to the wonder of the event. By focusing only on poetry, both the audience and the authors can immerse themselves in something too often ignored or simplified in the everyday world. By holding this event in the public library, the opportunity is available to all who love poetry and language. Again a quote from Billy Collins: “I am convinced that for every nonreader of poetry, there is a poem waiting to reconnect them to poetry.” Another comment, usually from folks who’ve been talked into coming to the Chesapeake Poetry Festival by their friends or spouses, concerns the sense of being “shook up” when they hear

“It is largely from other poets that one begins to be a poet—you’re not going to become one through learning prosody, but through the energizing force of the word. I think every poet begins by simply being enchanted by the sound of words.”

STANLEY KUNITZ, a founder of Poets House (http://poetshouse.org/about.htm)
a poem that resonates in some personal way. People in the audience sit up or tear up or speak up when a poem moves them, and it happens at every reading.

The Chesapeake Poetry Festival has connected hundreds of people, from poets to students to patrons to staff, and sparked an interest in poetry and creative writing for people of all ages. Not an undertaking for the fainthearted, the festival is worth every bit of the effort put into it by the staff. We truly believe that: poetry and literature are about daily life; writing about living life should be a normal, everyday experience; and recognizing that the meaning of language belongs to the listener promotes a better understanding of oneself and others. Our goal is to continue to increase public awareness of the value of poetry, and encourage our community to make it a part of daily life. We look forward to many more successful years of presenting the Chesapeake Poetry Festival. (Check out www.chesapeake.lib.va.us for information on upcoming events.)

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Chesapeake Poetry Festival Poet List, 1993–2008

Adcock, Betty  
Baldwin, Beth  
Burris, Sidney  
Cairns, Scott  
Chitwood, Michael  
Dillard, Richard  
Donovan, Greg  
Drake, Jeannette  
Emerson, Claudia  
Fenza, David  
Garrett, George  
Gibson, Margaret  
Glasser, Jane Ellen  
Hart, Henry  
Huddle, David  
Hummer, T. R.  
Johnston, Mark  
Kennedy, Sarah  
Kutchins, Laurie  
Larson, Jeanne  
Levis, Larry  
Longley, Judy  
Moeckle, Thorpe  
Morgan, Elizabeth S.  
Nystrom, Debra  
Orr, Gregory  
Paul, Jay  
Raisor, Phillip  
Rankin, Paula  
Seibles, Tim  
Simpson, Grace  
Smith, Dave  
Smith, R. T.  
Smith, Ron  
Soniat, Katherine  
Stuart, Dabney  
Sylvester, Janet  
Taylor, Henry  
Tham, Hillary  
Trethewey, Eric  
Trethewey, Natasha  
Voight, Ellen B.  
Warn, Emily  
Wojahn, David  
Wright, Charles
“How to Plot a Murder”: 
An Interview with J. B. Stanley

by Lyn C. A. Gardner

J. B. Stanley is a mystery author with a special connection to libraries in Virginia: her Supper Club mysteries feature a small-town Virginia librarian as sleuth, while Stanley’s own love for libraries led her to earn her MLIS. With seven titles in two published series thus far, and another two series anticipated by 2010, Stanley found her start as a novelist upon moving to Virginia, whose various locales—both rural and urban—form the settings of many of her books. Her most recent book in the Supper Club series, Stiffs and Swine, was released by Midnight Ink on October 1, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-7387-1267-3), and features barbecue recipes that should appeal to the whole family. Throughout her writing career, Stanley has promoted the fun and excitement of the mystery genre through programs at libraries and partnerships with other writers. Her own mysteries provide delightful excursions into the vividly realized worlds of antiques or the Shenandoah Valley, with friendships and family relationships forming the core of characters who are easy to root for and identify with. While murder is a serious subject, these mysteries nevertheless leave one light of heart.

Currently, you have two ongoing mystery series: the Collectible mysteries, featuring Molly Appleby, an amateur sleuth who solves crimes in the antiques world while covering shows as a writer for Collector’s Weekly; and the Supper Club mysteries, whose crimes are solved by a group of friends who dub themselves the Flab Five, with the books centered around James Henry, who’s the head librarian of the main branch in Quincy’s Gap, Virginia, and formerly an English literature professor at the College of William and Mary. Would you
tell us something about how you came to create these characters, and what it’s like keeping up with two series at the same time?

**JBS** Molly is a bit autobiographical. I grew up surrounded by antiques, had grandparents who collected a variety of things from gems to Majolica, and my mother once owned an antique shop. I’ve had a part-time job in an auction gallery and have always felt a keen passion for old things.

Strange as this may sound, James and I are a bit alike too as we both share a love of books, fattening foods, and small towns. I began writing about the Flab Five while I was on a low-carb diet. I was so grumpy that I literally wanted to strangle the know-it-alls constantly telling me about their fast metabolisms or what I needed to do to lose the weight I’d gained while pregnant. Once I’d lost a few pounds, I was able to look back on those months and laugh at myself. Assuming that most Americans have been on a diet and shared my feelings of powerlessness and frustration, I decided to create a fictional dieter’s support group in the form of a supper club.

**VL** Both series include fun “special features” that enhance the narrative. The Collectible mysteries include collector’s tips, with an appendix that includes photographs and an overview of examples of the type of antique featured in the narrative (such as walking sticks), a prologue that gives a fictional history of the particular antique in question, and quotes about the nature and history of that antique at the head of each chapter. The Supper Club mysteries, with their food-titled chapters, include recipes, nutrition information, serving size, or health club points for the dishes that appear in the novels, located near the point in the story in which that food plays a role. When you initially conceived of these series, how did you happen to decide to include these tidbits? What role, if any, do they play in shaping the structure of the novels?

**JBS** In the antique series, the educational tips were the original “hook” that helped sell the series to Berkley Prime Crime. I had to conduct an immense amount of research per book, so I figured I should share the knowledge I’d gained with my readers (while I could still remember it!). I wanted to add the lyrical/historical sections in those books in order to really bring the object (whether it was pottery, an antique desk, or a walking stick) to life for the reader. Those are actually my favorite parts of the Molly Appleby books.

As for the Supper Club books, I couldn’t resist showing readers the difference between the nutritional content of a serving of cheese puffs and a serving of, say, an apple. We all know that unhealthy foods taste so much better, but it can be shocking to see what’s in a manufactured food such as a cheese doodle when it’s set down on paper. I wanted to include recipes because I love to cook. (Well, I love to bake. I’m a decent cook, but I make a mean cupcake.)

**VL** You hold both an MA in English literature and an MLIS. You’ve taught sixth-grade language arts and worked part-time at an auction gallery, as well as writing articles for *AntiqueWeek*. What inspired you to get your MLIS? Have you worked in a library?

**JBS** When I was teaching in North Carolina, I felt as though I’d like to try a new career. I’d been a teacher for eight years and just wanted to stretch my wings a bit. I’ve always loved librar-
ies and books and I feel as though librarians are the unsung heroes of education. They assist patrons of all ages and backgrounds and I wanted to do just that. Unfortunately, I couldn’t find a job upon moving to Richmond, so I began to work at Barnes & Noble in Short Pump while writing *A Killer Collection* during my free time. So, in a way, Henrico County is responsible for my writing career! Thank you, friends!

**VL** You have a lot of personal background that informs the professional lives you’ve created for your amateur detectives. In addition to your own antiques work, your parents and grandparents both taught you to love antiques from an early age, and Molly’s knowledge, as well as her relationships with family and friends, clearly draw upon your own love for and experiences in the field. What are some of the library memories or experiences that may have contributed to your Supper Club series? Have you ever considered writing a series that draws upon your own love for and experiences in the field.

**JBS** The children’s librarian at the Harbordale Public Library in Greenlawn, New York, was a magical woman. All through my childhood, I believed this person was part mind reader, part fairy godmother. She read stories aloud with a melodious voice, found books containing whatever subject I was currently obsessed with, and gave me stickers for each new genre I explored. I would never have begun my love affair with books without this woman, and I don’t even remember her name. That’s the kind of librarian I wanted my protagonist to be. James Henry Carse deeply for each and every patron in his small library nestled in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley.

**VL** One of your online biographical statements explains that you began your first novel, *A Killer Collection*, after your family moved to Richmond, Virginia, in part because you missed North Carolina, including your family, friends, and the antiques world. Your love for your own mother clearly shows through in Molly’s relationship with her mother Clara, and your knowledge and love of antiques shines through every page of the Collectible mysteries. Before you moved, had you ever given thought to writing such a novel as you stored up experiences? How long did it take you to write that first book? Did the writing experience surprise you?

**JBS** I’ve wanted to write a novel since I was a teenager. In fact, I wrote two-thirds of a historical romance in junior high and the same amount of a vampire thriller in high school. After that, I focused on poetry for a while, but the lure of a full-length work of prose kept tugging at me. My homesickness was the emotion that forced me to the computer day after day. I really didn’t know anyone here and I missed my family. I’d seen my mother and grandmother daily for the past ten years. It was hard to leave them, but I wrote most of *A Killer Collection’s* draft in four months. Then I got stuck and didn’t know how to finish it. I put it away for a few months and actually had a dream about the ending. And the rest is history.

**VL** Your website (http://www.jbstanley.com/) describes your early experiences as a writer, composing stories with your grandfather and later showing him the work you completed on your own. Do you feel as though you’re carrying on a gift from your grandfather?

**JBS** I couldn’t have been anything successful without the support of my maternal grandparents. In every letter and during every visit they’d tell me I could grow up to be whatever I set my mind to. From the age of eight, I’d decided on being a writer of some sort. “Fine,” my grandfather answered seriously. “Then we’d better get started now.”

**VL** The Supper Club mysteries, in addition to featuring a small-town librarian hero, are set in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley region of Virginia. Would you tell us something about the experience and research that have gone into writing these novels? As much as I love reading about this lovely area (and you do a great job of conveying both the lifestyle and the grandeur of the scene), I was curious to know what inspired you to choose this setting rather than your current home, Richmond.

**JBS** I truly discovered the heartwarming majesty of the Shenandoah right after the tragic events of September 11th. Mourning the loss of innocent lives, I wanted to flee the city and spend some time surrounded by natural beauty. I headed west on I-64 until I hit the scenic overlook near I-81. I found what I was looking for and have been back to the area many times since then. In fact, whenever I get stuck on a plotline, I drive west and all my problems seem inconsequential.

**VL** Do you have any favorite libraries or bookstores that you’d like to share with us?
I love all the Henrico County Library branches as well as the Library of Virginia. My favorite independent bookstores are Creatures 'n Crooks Bookshoppe, The Fountain Bookstore, and The Black Swan. All of these are in downtown Richmond. But honestly, I love all tiny book stores across America, even more so if there’s a resident cat in the shop!

Your latest novel, the Supper Club mystery *Stiffs and Swine*, was just released on October 1. Would you tell us something about it?

The fourth book in the Supper Club series is my favorite thus far. The blurb says it best: “The supper club members are invited to be guest judges at a regional barbecue contest and they accept the invitation faster than you can say ‘hog heaven.’ But the barbecue festival's family-oriented, finger-licking fun turns sour when a contestant is found dead. Things go from bad to worse when one of the five friends is accused of the murder and lands in jail. The strained relationship between James and Lucy is still no picnic, but the supper club members must stick together to find the real killer. This title includes authentic barbecue-friendly recipes.”

I thought I’d better write a book in which the recipes would be welcomed by men as well as women! My husband loved having to sample all the oven barbecue brisket attempts. Plus, I felt as though James and friends needed a change of scenery. They’ll be back in Quincy’s Gap for the next book, *The Battered Body*, which is due out March 1, 2009.

You’ve developed discussion questions for all your books, available through your website. You’re also a member of Cozy Chicks (http://www.cozychicks.com/), a group of seven women who write cozy mysteries and offer monthly contests to reward faithful readers with prizes such as “an adorable Cozy Chicks tote bag … stuffed with our books (all signed of course) as well as other goodies like candles, lotions, notepads, tea, etc.” You put on many programs in libraries, and offer to provide a free prize to any book club that you attend in person or via phone. In addition to the need to market your own books, you clearly love to promote mysteries and reading in general, and you’ve discovered some delightful ways to appeal to readers. Would you tell us how you got involved with the Cozy Chicks and got started on some of these marketing concepts? Do you have a definite sense of promoting reading and inspiring a new generation of mystery readers?

The writing community is quite intimate. It only takes a few conferences before you recognize fellow writers and become friends with many of them. We depend on one another and we truly try to help one another get a leg up. Promotion is a fuzzy business and I have no experience in the world of PR, but it seems as though every author now needs a website, a blog, and an arsenal of self-promotion techniques. We’re in an age of Information Overload, so it’s better to work as a group. Frankly, I asked the Cozy Chicks if I could join theirs, and they welcomed me with open arms. Since then, we promote one another as much as possible, but I will blither on to anyone willing to listen about dozens of mystery authors. And why not? It’s what I love to read!

How do you balance writing with raising two children? How long does it take you to write a book, and what percentage of that time is spent on research? Has it gotten easier the more you’ve written?

Yes, it’s gotten easier with each book. I have about six months to write a book and it looks like I’ll have six to nine months per book in regards to my upcoming series beginning with *The Haiku Murders*. This series, which is being published by Berkley Prime Crime, is set on the North Carolina Coast in the small town of Fog Horn and features a group of fiction writers. The first book should come out in early 2010. I write every day, mostly in the mornings while my kids are in school, and I try to research and/or edit in the afternoons. I answer emails throughout the day and do my best to respond to readers within twenty-four hours. I can only keep this schedule by being organized, healthy, and having plenty of coffee on hand.

Your Collectible mysteries are published by Berkley Prime Crime (http://berleysignetmysteries.com/), an arm of the Berkley Publishing Group/Penguin Group—a well-established publisher. Meanwhile, your Supper Club mysteries are put out by Midnight Ink (http://www,midnightinkbooks.com/), a relative newcomer that bills itself as “a fresh new voice in mystery fiction.” How do you happen to be a fresh new voice in mystery fiction?

Midnight Ink is a smaller press, so while my books aren’t on as many shelves as I’d
like them to be, the trade size and covers are fantastic. I’ve felt very involved in every step of each book and that’s been a wonderful experience. Berkley Prime Crime is one of the mystery publishing giants. It is an honor to be able to write two series for them. They are aggressive about getting their books on the shelves and are experienced professionals in every aspect of the publishing business. (By the way, I also have a series coming out with St. Martin’s in late 2009/early 2010. It’s a Bible study mystery series and is set in Richmond, so I’ll have had a dance with three publishing partners by 2010. What fun!)

VL Given the season and the theme of this special issue of Virginia Libraries, I wanted to allow our readers to share one of my favorite images in Carbs & Cadavers: the library float in the Halloween Parade, “entitled ‘The Magic of Words.’ The Fitzgerald Brothers had created several books the size of small cars. Standing on top of one of the open books was the Headless Horseman. ... The fearsome rider, astride a real black horse, held a menacing jack-o’-lantern in the crook of his arm as he pointed an accusing finger at the townsfolk. On top of another book was the monster from Frankenstein. ...[B]olts of electricity seemed to be jolting the figure right off its metal lab table. The last book was what excited the crowd the most. Standing upward, so that people behind the float could read the title on the spine as well as on the front cover, the text was the much beloved Harry Potter. On top of the pages, Francis had dressed himself as Harry and sat astride a broomstick. Waving to the cheering masses, he flew in an arc around the book, dispensing Tootsie Pops as he pretended to chase the Golden Snitch. ... James noticed tiny pieces of paper wound around the lollipop sticks. Apparently, each lollipop came with a recommended read for those who ‘dared to be scared’... All of the spectators were pointing at their slips and discussing the book titles written there.”

VL I think that’s a marvelous concept and an exciting way to draw new readers. Do you know any real-life libraries who are doing things like this? It makes me think we’ve lost a valuable community outreach librarian when you became a novelist!

JBS I don’t think libraries have a budget for the things I’d

If I had my wish, they’d all have coffee bars, rooms where books were brought to life through virtual reality, and the most exciting book clubs ever!

VL You seem to have so many creative ideas about getting readers involved with books, as demonstrated not only by your own marketing ideas, but also within the Supper Club mysteries themselves, with the characters devising innovative ways to fund their struggling library and get the public excited about reading. Do you have any advice for other writers and librarians who want to do the same?

JBS I think libraries need to shake things up a bit. Instead of having one author in to speak, ask a group. Create a panel in which readers and hopeful writers can get involved instead of listen-
ing to a lecture. Add food. People love food. The Tuckahoe Library handed out door prizes at my event and patrons wore silly necklaces, pins, and other paraphernalia to honor my book, Chili con Corpses. These little touches created a festive air, and the wine didn’t hurt either! Books should be celebrated, and the notion of a stuffy literary event doesn’t sound as appealing as wine, desserts, and a group of people plotting a murder!

Writers can often be hermits. … the notion of a stuffy literary event doesn’t sound as appealing as wine, desserts, and a group of people plotting a murder!

After all, we’re typically introverts, so we need to join together to succeed. Get involved with listservs, national and local writer’s organizations (such as James River Writers or Virginia Writers Club), and try to be a part of a group blog. Mingle with other writers and ask them questions. They are an approachable, friendly lot, I promise you.

Thank you for reading this interview. I am truly honored to have been included in a publication read by librarians. You are my heroes!

Finding Virginia Authors

Looking for local authors for programs or to improve your collection of Virginia writers? Here are a few good places to start.

- Virginia Commission for the Arts, Directory of Writers in Virginia: http://www.arts.state.va.us/directories/writers/search.asp.
- James River Writers: http://www.jamesriverwriters.com/. Richmond-based group that hosts conferences, contests, and literary events. Remember to find out if your area hosts a local writers group!
- Mystery Writers of America, Mid-Atlantic Chapter: http://www.mwa-ma.org/. There's a librarian membership category for those who wish to keep up with publications, events, and authors through listservs, newsletters, and invitations to local events.
- Sisters in Crime, Virginia Chapter: http://www.sistersincrime.org/chapters.html#VA
- Romance Writers of America: http://www.rwanational.org/. Search the Speakers Bureau by author, state, or genre: http://www.rwanational.org/cs/speakers_bureau. There are librarian memberships, a library-oriented webpage, and a list of author websites.

Don’t forget the bookstores in your area. Chain stores may have a section of local interest. The independent stores often have robust sections devoted to local writers, many of them online (check out Richmond’s Fountain Bookstore: http://www.fountainbookstore.com/NASApp/store/Default.jsp?sessionid=abc123&locale=us). University bookstores provide sections by faculty and alumni, many of them Virginia writers. Browse websites of local colleges (particularly the English department) for faculty, literary magazines, and events. Library staff who are alumni of local universities can check newsletters for publication announcements.

Remember to check your newspaper for literary events and awards. There are many literary events at local bookstores, as well as other libraries (some have email announcement lists). Pay attention to local and state literary awards like the Library of Virginia Literary Awards (http://www.lva.virginia.gov/whatwedo/awards/), VLA’s own Jefferson Cup Awards (http://www.vla.org/library/jeffersoncup/index.html), or the York County Public Library Annual Literary Competition (http://www.yorkcounty.gov/library/annualcompetitions). (Look to judges and finalists as well as winners.) Attend local conferences and festivals, like the ODU Literary Festival (http://www.lib.odu.edu/litfest/30th/index.htm), the CNU Writers’ Conference (http://writers.cnu.edu/), or the Chesapeake Poetry Festival (see p. 49; http://www.chesapeake.lib.va.us/).

Check out Virginia arts organizations like the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (http://www.virginiafoundation.org/), including their Center for the Book (see p. 14; http://www.virginiafoundation.org/bookcenter/). Finally, sites like BookTour (http://booktour.com/readers/search) can be searched by state for writers and literary events.
All Ages Enjoy
Mathews Memorial Library

by Catherine C. Brooks

In July 2005, I received copies of my first book, *Walk with Me*. Two years later, the first in the series of “Catherine’s Tales,” *Didn’t Know We Were Poor*, became available for Market Days sales and signings. I’ve also been published in *Good Old Days* magazine and *Chesapeake Style*. Through it all, Mathews Memorial Library assisted me with obtaining information, and also welcomed me to do book sales and signings in the library lobby during Mathews Market Days each year.

Having used facilities at Mathews Memorial Library to research my book publications, I have learned even more about what the library offers. In 2006, First Lady Laura Bush selected our library as one of six in the United States to receive a 2005 award for “the nation’s highest honor for libraries and museums.” I’d like others to know about the library’s achievements and what good leaders have accomplished in our small county. As an author and library patron, I’d also like to share how this library has helped get books to readers.

History

After World War I, many public discussions took place concerning a proper memorial for those Mathews men who had lost their

Catherine C. Brooks (maecallis@msn.com) published her second book, *Didn’t Know We Were Poor*, the first in her series of “Catherine’s Tales,” in August 2007. Her first book, *Walk with Me*, about post offices nationally and why there were forty-four in Mathews County, Virginia, was published in 2005 and continues to sell.

Original library built in the 1930s and dedicated in 1935.
lives in the war. Once the decision was made to build a public library, fundraisers began. First one community and then another sponsored ice cream socials, art exhibits, oyster roasts, and other activities to aid the fund. By 1933, the building had been completed, and people began donating the first books. Then the August Storm brought devastation with hurricane winds and high tides that covered much of the county. The first librarian, Irene Brooks, along with her staff of one and volunteers, salvaged most of the water-soaked books, rebinding those that needed it. On August 1, 1935, the library officially opened.

By 1979, the library had outgrown its capacity to hold displays, available books, and equipment needed to satisfy public demand. Meanwhile, Farmers Bank of Mathews needed additional space. The bank purchased property and constructed a new building beyond Main Street. Once the bank relocated, the stately building left behind on Main Street offered an ideal place for Mathews Memorial Library. The county made the purchase. Time-consuming renovations converted the bank to a public library. Once the interior was completed, Mathews Memorial Library moved from Church Street to Main Street.

Technology and readers' needs continued to increase until by the late 1970s the library couldn't satisfy these demands without expansion. The twenty-first century would require not only more technology, but also more interaction among county citizens. The children's department also needed to expand. Plans were made, and both the Board of Trustees and the Friends of the Mathews Memorial Library took on added responsibility for a massive enlargement with an outside reading garden.

Friends of Mathews Memorial Library

In the spring of 1982, fourteen women met for the purpose of organizing a support group for Mathews Memorial Library. The original group of volunteers, which had assisted with the library’s upkeep and growth since the 1930s, had passed on or were unable to play an active role. However, the need had become greater than in previous years, demanding a proper organization. They selected “Friends of the Mathews Memorial Library” as the name for the group. Once established, the organization grew. The statistics in February 2007 showed that the membership stood at 319, including 243 life members.

During the addition to the library, the Orrell Building supplied basic books from the main library for the public to use. Captain Robert W. Orrell had willed a sizable amount to the library upon his death in 1988. They used the money that was available from the estate immediately after his death to erect the multipurpose building behind the library from which the Friends operate. It houses a used bookstore and serves as an office and meeting place for the Friends officers and executive committee, all volunteers.

The income generated comes from individual donations, grants, book sales, commemorative brick purchases, and dues. Over the past six years, the Friends have contributed over $130,000 to the Memorial Library. In 2006, the Friends funded library programs and purchased books, audio books, computers, furnishings, and equipment totaling $31,114. Members of the Friends contribute approximately 2,000 volunteer hours per year in carrying out the responsibilities and projects of the organization. It is a Friends volunteer who greets patrons at the checkout desk and helps those still learning to access their email.

The Friends established the “Buy-a-Brick Program” in 2001, entailing the construction of a Brick Commemorative Patio and Walk located between the Orrell Building and the library. Bricks that honor or memorialize clubs, individuals, and families are an integral part of the patio, and new names are constantly being added. The “Buy-a-Brick Program” has generated funds both for the library and donations of books to others.

Enlarged and Renovated Building

In August 2002, staff members opened the doors to the enlarged and renovated Mathews Memorial Library. Patrons entered a lobby unlike anything seen before in Mathews County. A spiral stairway curved to the second floor, enhancing the beauty of the tall ceiling. Matching carpet covered the lobby and steps, while upholstered chairs invited one to sit and read the daily paper lying on the side table. The copy machine sat in a secluded corner—convenient, but out of sight. One couldn’t see the staff and volunteers’ workspace until one walked left to enter the main library. Beyond the lobby, bookshelves sat in plain view. Overall, the appearance spoke of elegance.
Mathews Market Days takes place yearly on the first Friday and Saturday after Labor Day. With the enlarged and renovated building open, staff members give tours to readers and researchers. Beyond the well-organized shelves of fiction, nonfiction, reference books, magazines, videos, CDs, and DVDs, with computer stations and reading tables interspersed between them, one passes through opened doors to enter an area with glass showcases displaying artifacts or other collections, featured monthly—a small historical museum. To the left is the huge entrance to the John Warren Cooke Conference Center. With all the doors pushed into their pockets to open up the room, quilters set up displays for Market Days. Double glass doors lead to the handicapped entrance to the reading garden or the parking lot by way of the sidewalk. Straight ahead, a glass wall of windows contains a center door labeled “Youth Conference Room, in memory of Mae A. Hudgins.” This Youth Library, complete with books, computers, and appropriate seats, is also used for readings and other youth activities. Rosey Clark heads Youth Services, with volunteers assisting her.

On a regular day, the John Warren Cooke Conference Center remains closed with a solid standard door that one may enter for civic meetings of various organizations. Computer classes, classical music classes, and tea dances are a few of the many activities that take place in the conference center. It depends on the occasion as to whether the room has a set of worktables and chairs; rows of chairs with a podium for the speaker; or an opened space with, or without, tables or chairs on sides of the wall.

One can take either the spiral stairway or elevator to reach the Chesapeake Room, which holds Mathews County records dating back to the 1600s, when Mathews was Kingston Parish of Gloucester County. On the 2002 renovation tour, the staff had only begun to place the data on microfilm; today, this continuous job is more up to date.

Marked by a plaque, the Herman Hollerith Archives takes up an area with a locked gate in the main library. Here are the Mathews County Historical Society records, relocated from the second floor of Tompkins Cottage to a more secure area. In earlier years, this room housed the bank’s vault.

**Adult Educational Programs**

The library offers free computer classes by trained instructors in three tiers: Basic Computer Skills (three sessions); Intermediate Internet (four sessions); and Specialty Classes (two sessions). The Digital Camera Workshop (two sessions) teaches the new camera owner details on operation, how to shoot pictures, and how to transfer and edit the pictures.

The Adult Literacy Program, headed by Leigh Wilder, is a community gift of concern and sharing that can transform the lives of those it serves. The program is more than student’s books and teacher’s manuals. Since it is sensitive to students, volunteers, and the community alike, the program can win support and move the cause of literacy forward. Quoting from Mathews Memorial Library’s brochure, “For every literacy student who earns a high school degree or a college diploma—for every student who holds a new job, or who can read a children’s story or study the Bible—that program has opened a whole new world.”

The program used by the library, under the sponsorship of the Mathews Community Foundation, has launched an adult literacy program aimed at providing assistance to adults in the community. It teaches basic reading skills to ensure that adults can read at a functional level. A skills assessment test is given to place the student at an appropriate learning level. Trained tutors work with students on an individual basis. Scheduling can be designed to meet individual
needs. Meanwhile, all information about program participants remains confidential.

**Bringing the Library to You**

Any Mathews County resident who is homebound is eligible for “Bringing the Library to You.” Patrons just call the library phone number, ask for Leigh Wilder, and tell her what they’d like. One may choose from books, books on tape or CD, and selections from the Music Library. All materials are available for the same loan periods that apply to in-person patrons.

Volunteers deliver and pick up material on a regular delivery cycle matching the loan period of the library. If one prefers, a person designated by the patron can pick up the materials from the library. A patron makes requests in advance so staff can check out the materials and have them packaged for fast pickup.

There is no charge for this program. Patrons are responsible for both borrowed materials and replacement costs for any items not returned to the library when requested.

“Lessons in Pleasure” and “Musical Emotions”

Thomas Steel, a native of North England who’s had a great interest in classical music since he was a young man, teaches two music appreciation classes. Steel moved to Mathews County in 1987 with his wife Jean in order to serve as pastor for Peniel Evangelical Friends Church.

In “Lessons in Pleasure,” Steel provides his students with knowledge of musical forms, techniques, and terms. He identifies the instruments of the orchestra through words and sound and discusses the powerful force of social and national influences on music cre-
An adult program in the John Warren Cooke Conference Center.

In the John Warren Cooke Conference Center.


“Musical Emotions” investigates the emotions that music engenders in four sessions: “War and Peace,” “Sadness and Happiness,” “Fear and Joy,” and “Tchaikovsky: The Man in His Music.”

Both classes are limited to thirty persons.

Tea Dances

Mathews County business establishments sponsor four tea dances each year in the John Warren Cooke Conference Center. Flyers invite the community to “Come and dance or sit and listen to your old-time favorites!” The dances, with their live music, bring memories to the old and show the young the social life of another era.

Children’s Activities and Trips

Rosey Clark organizes children’s trips to museums in Norfolk, Newport News, Hampton, and other places of interest. On other days, children listen to interesting readings, watch videos or DVDs, learn games played in other countries on local public playgrounds, and participate in hands-on learning experiences.

There are also bus trips for adults to the Library of Virginia in Richmond to see special exhibits, hear speakers, and tour homes. In December 2008, patrons will travel to see the exhibit “Working Out Her Destiny: Women’s History in Virginia.” In the afternoon, the group will tour an older home used by the Woman’s Club since 1900.

The Mathews Memorial Library and Mathews County Historical Society Merge Archives

When I began researching my first book, Walk with Me, for which I needed data only found in Mathews County Historical Society’s files, I’d meet Reed Lawson at Tompkins Cottage, the historical building the society had restored, at a prearranged date and time. Lawson brought folders from the locked room on the second floor, and I’d hand-copy the information I needed. We worked approximately two hours a month. Though I had found historical facts about post offices nationally and had the names and dates of each of the forty-four post offices in Mathews County, I needed more. I wondered how long it’d take to glean it.

When the workers began enlarging the library, Lawson told me the Historical Society’s records would be moved to the library’s archives. I could have access to them any
day I wanted and make copies. I rejoiced at the good news. The records added valuable information, but I also needed to do many interviews when the articles didn’t tell the full story. While I waited for the completion of the library, I spent time interviewing people who were retired at home or in nursing homes, as well as active older folk still living at home.

After the doors opened to the enlarged library, I spent several mornings and afternoons with Reed Lawson and Becky Barnhardt, until I had the facts that the book required. Other than to make my selections, I didn’t handle the papers since Lawson or Barnhardt copied what I needed before it was returned to the secured area. A trying task had become a pleasure.

In my interview with Becky Barnhardt, I asked if others had used the archives for book research. Barnhardt said that one had gathered some information, but no one else had spent the hours that I did in research at the library for the books they wrote. However, letters, telephone calls, and emails with requests for genealogy information, records of land transfers, and other statistics keep her busy. The Chesapeake Room contains books that pertain to other counties in Virginia, as well as Mathews County. On Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday, Barnhardt can usually be found inside the otherwise locked area searching records or in the Chesapeake Room. Requests require her to find information that doesn’t always pertain to Mathews County, such as requests that concern the Commonwealth of Virginia or the Chesapeake Bay. The requests come from as far away as California, Washington State, Texas, and all the places in between.

One query asked about the fish, oyster, and crab industries. Another correspondent, who knew grandfather owned a sawmill, wanted to know the type of lumber he sawed from native trees. Questioners ask for information in order to write small booklets so that posterity will better understand what their ancestors did to live. The reasons for the research are as varied as the questions.

When I realized that Walk with Me didn’t contain information as to how New Point Comfort received its name, I contacted Barnhardt. In a few days, she phoned to tell me she’d left what I needed at the checkout counter. One of the men in John Smith’s expedition who had named Old Point Comfort in Norfolk, Virginia, had also named the site New Point Comfort. At that time, the site contained over a hundred acres and made a safe harbor.

I am presently writing a book about World War II for which I began research in spring 2008. Without the information from the Historical Society Archives and the Chesapeake Room scrapbooks, I’d not have the book that I’m planning to publish.

Library Helps Authors Reach Readers

Our local newspaper, the Gloucester-Mathews Gazette-Journal, prints press releases with invitations to book signings in Mathews Memorial Library. These authors have either written about a phase of local history, used Mathews as the setting for a novel, or resided in Mathews County.

After Walk with Me was released in July 2005, I presented Mathews Memorial Library with a copy. Later, I asked permission to sell and sign books on the Saturday of Market Days. The director welcomed me and supplied a spot in the lobby with a table and chair. I have been in the lobby of Mathews Memorial Library every Market Day Saturday since that time.

When an author from Williamsburg with whom I sell and sign books went to the Mathews County Archives in the Library of Virginia, the first thing she picked up was Walk with Me. I don’t know who presented it, or who made the choice to include it in the archives. It pleases me. I spent most of three years researching and writing the book.

Mathews Memorial Library Rewarded

In 2006, First Lady Laura Bush selected Mathews Memorial Library as one of six in the United States to receive the 2005 award for “the nation’s highest honor for libraries and museums.” When Mathews Memorial Library Director Bette Dillehay traveled to Washington DC to accept the award, Chong Deggs accompanied her. Deggs spoke about how the adult literacy programs had helped her get her GED and allowed her to move closer to her goal of obtaining a higher education. Laura Bush’s secretary, Mary L. Chute, presented the awards and said the six winners of the awards were “centers of excellence that connect people to information and ideas—and to each other.”

An interesting point in the survey of the libraries concerned the public funds required. Mathews Memorial Library operates on a budget of $187,496, compared to the next-lowest award-winner’s budget of $510,000. The low operating cost is possible due to the work done by the Friends of the Mathews Memorial Library and volunteers, both of whom help make it successful. The director and board of trustees also receive grants to achieve their goals.
How did white Protestant Virginians devise and accept a theology that justified their enslavement of black Protestant Virginians…?

IRONS REVIEW

Hayes’s study of Jefferson’s mind and of his reading and writing habits is very learned and elegantly written, much like Jefferson’s own writings. Jefferson made notes on much of his reading, some of it in the form of annotations in the margins of his books and some of it in a literary commonplace book in which he abstracted or transcribed favorite passages. The fascinating details that Hayes retrieved from Jefferson’s notes illuminate the many famous letters and public papers that Jefferson wrote about our political institutions and traditions by which our national literary history is enriched.

The publisher is to be commended for setting the price of this very large book much lower than is now customary for important studies in intellectual and literary scholarship to allow people who wish to understand Thomas Jefferson to acquire and savor this fine scholarship.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography


Two rich chapters on the rise of evangelical Protestant Christianity in colonial and Revolutionary Virginia among both black and white Virginians and one shorter chapter on the post-Civil War racial segregation of Virginia’s churches bracket several rich chapters on the religious beliefs and practices of those Virginians during the decades between the American Revolution and the American Civil War. The central question that drives Charles F. Irons’s inquiry is this: How did white Protestant Virginians devise and accept a theology that justified their enslavement of black Protestant Virginians

Sara B. Bearss is senior editor of the Dictionary of Virginia Biography, published by the Library of Virginia.
whom they recognized as children of God, also?

This is as much a story of how and what black Virginians did and believed as it is about how and what white Virginians did and believed. In their racially integrated churches, white Virginians developed their ideas about Christianity and racial differences that by the final decades of the antebellum period convinced them that white stewardship and conversion work among enslaved (and some free) black Virginians justified the existence of slavery and gave meaning and purpose to the religious lives of the white people who were engaged in the saving of black people's souls. A proslavery theology allowed them to guide and control the religious lives of enslaved people.

This subtle and contextually rich account of the role of religious beliefs and practices among Virginia's large and diverse population is based on deep research in private papers and church records. It explains more convincingly than any previous scholarship how Christians embraced the seeming savagery of slavery as a positive good for themselves and also for their enslaved fellow Christians. It also sets the stage for understanding more thoroughly how in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery white Virginia Christians pushed their beliefs further into advocacy of racial segregation and a new theology of polygenesis—that black people were not, in fact, descended from Adam and Eve, and therefore not even part of the same human race with white people, and therefore easy victims for several decades of the savagery of Jim Crow.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography


This well-written and well-conceived study of the criminal court records of Richmond from the 1830s through the 1850s focuses on slaves and slavery, but it also includes valuable information and insights about free African-Americans and the white judges, attorneys, lawmakers, and others who encountered enslaved black men and women in court. Since the seventeenth century, enslaved Virginians had been tried for alleged infractions of the law in courts that had no juries and in which the procedural protections of the common law were largely absent. In the most serious cases, legal counsel was often provided, but, for the most part, enslaved men and women who were accused of crimes were entirely at the mercy of white court officials. For free blacks, their place in the judicial system had been somewhere between the vulnerable degradation forced on the slaves and the legal protections routinely afforded to all white people; but during the decades before the Civil War abolished slavery, Virginia's free black population when in court was gradually forced into a situation similar to that of slaves.

James M. Campbell dramatically demonstrates the extent to which the legal system that the owners of slaves devised worked to their advantage at the expense of their enslaved property. Campbell also provides strong evidence that the internal inconsistencies within that legal system, as internal inconsistencies within the system of slavery generally, often inadvertently worked to the disadvantage of slave owners.

That is most startlingly conspicuous in the cases Campbell describes involving Virginians of mixed race, some of whom were of such pale complexions that judges and juries and neighbors and physicians could not determine whether they were black or white. That determination was of fundamental importance, because although white people could testify against black people, black people could not testify against white people; and if it was not possible to tell whether a person was the one or the other, the justice system, such as it was, failed as a consequence of one of its own props.

Slavery on Trial is not so much about slavery or about trials or even about crimes as it is about the internal contradictions and self-defeating inconsistencies of slavery in a society that boasted of being based on the rule of law. The law of slavery was a brutal thing for all black Virginians, but it was a difficult tool for white Virginians to wield without occasionally wounding themselves and the system that the law of slavery was supposed to regulate.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography

James Harvey Ferguson (1817–1898)’s career as a public servant began humbly enough in 1839 as a Cabell County jailor. This inauspicious beginning evolved into something more promising six years later when, having devoted himself to the study of law, he was appointed prosecutor for nearby Logan County. An excellent public speaker, Ferguson persuaded constituents in 1848 to elect him to the Virginia House of Delegates, won reelection in 1850, and represented, with two other men, seven western counties in Virginia’s 1850–1851 constitutional convention. In those proceedings Ferguson employed his skills as an orator to argue on behalf of the western counties for internal improvements. He emerged as an effective political leader and eventually won public acclaim unthought of a decade earlier.

And then, for reasons that may never be fully understood, in the mid-1850s Ferguson left his wife, children, a successful law practice, and a flowering political career to journey west, where he remained for about ten years. He moved, it seems, from place to place. His disappearance, it was rumored, may have been linked to a relationship with a woman or to financial worries; but no evidence has surfaced to support the former or confirm the latter. Ferguson offered no public explanations after he returned east in 1864. Although these missing years were a source of speculation during Ferguson’s lifetime and after his death, author Kenneth R. Bailey contends that the reason may simply have been that he needed to leave the state to earn a proper living for his family. Certainly the surprising ease with which Ferguson picked up the threads of private life would support such a theory. His wife having died several years previously, he set up a law practice in Cabell County, reestablished his house-

Chandra Manning’s What This Cruel War Was Over directly and persuasively challenges one of the most enduring assertions to be found in Civil War historiography: that the men who fought on either side did not initially (or at all, according to some interpretations) regard slavery as the central cause of the war. What This Cruel War Was Over is one of the best, most persuasive, and deeply researched books on the subject of what Civil War soldiers thought about the war. It has received the Avery O. Craven Prize from the Organization of American Historians and also honorable mention for the 2008 Lincoln Prize, administered by Gettysburg College.

Manning’s reading of thousands of wartime letters and newspapers of Confederate soldiers and of both black and white Union soldiers convinced her that on the whole Confederates understood from the beginning that their army was fighting to preserve a distinctive way of life that everybody acknowledged was based on slave labor. Union soldiers on the whole, though by no means always sympathetic to abolition and often betraying a large measure of racial prejudice, understood that their army was fighting to preserve a free nation that slavery and secession threatened to destroy. After black men were allowed to enlist in the Union army, even though they received less pay than white soldiers and were treated poorly in many instances, they certainly regarded the war as a war of liberation for enslaved people and fought bravely and well. They convinced many doubting Union men that they were deserving of freedom, even if not always of respect and equality.

Manning very persuasively charts subtle changes in the opinions that Union soldiers expressed about slavery, about emancipation, and about black people generally. During 1863, Manning concludes, “the men of the Union rank and file on the whole continued to serve as advocates of emancipation, partly because they knew that emancipation was necessary to save the Union, but also because they now recognized that it was necessary to make the Union worth saving” (p. 83).

After emancipation became the obvious consequence if the Confederacy was defeated, Confederate soldiers in some instances redoubled their commitment to winning for that very reason, but in other instances they began to question whether they were paying an unnecessarily heavy price to preserve an institution from which they poorly benefited.

What This Cruel War Was Over should be regarded as essential reading for anybody who wishes to understand the men who fought in the American Civil War.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography


In this volume, the noted Civil War historian Gary W. Gallagher turns his attention to the manner in which popular culture, particularly through film and contemporary art, has shaped public understanding of the underlying causes of the devastating four-year conflict and portrayed, for better or worse, the nature and motivations of the combatants involved. A natural subject for the big screen, the Civil War was depicted on film several years before D. W. Griffith produced his controversial masterpiece Birth of a Nation (1915) and was most memorably portrayed in the 1939 motion picture adaptation of Margaret Mitchell’s novel of the South, Gone With the Wind. But while Gallagher comments on these films, and to a lesser extent on such other notable cinematic efforts as John Huston’s Red Badge of Courage (1951) and Shenandoah (1965), the latter a wartime chronicle of a Virginia family opposed to slavery, he primarily focuses on some fourteen movies produced during the last two decades, thereby extending a study undertaken by Edward D. C. Campbell Jr. in The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth (1981), which examined the first seven decades of Hollywood’s fascination with the Civil War. Toward the end of the book, Gallagher also assesses the effects of the expanding market for contemporary Civil War art, a phenomenon much in evidence during the last twenty years.

In surveying the ways in which the war has been interpreted, Gal-
 lagher examines four competing traditions. He begins his discussion with a historical overview of the Lost Cause tradition. The term, taken from Edward Pollard’s 1866 history of the Confederacy, became synonymous with the efforts of Southerners, many of whom were former high-ranking Confederate officers, to win in the eyes of posterity what they had lost on the battlefield. Prominent among them was former Confederate lieutenant general Jubal Anderson Early, who, in his 1866 memoir and in subsequent writings, undertook a defense of Southern gallantry and national aims while describing in the harshest terms the destructive war, sometimes aimed at civilians, that Union armies had waged. These writers emphasized the long odds against which the Southern soldier heroically fought for his ideals and trumpeted states’ rights and economic independence as legitimate political goals while downplaying slavery’s major role in igniting the war. This tradition dominated the cultural landscape for decades and lingers on today, although in a much weakened state.

In contrast, the rival Union Cause championed Northern efforts to defend the work of the Founding Fathers by preserving, through force of arms, the democratic ideals threatened by an aggressively expanding, cruel slavocracy. Although certainly not neglected by Hollywood, until recently this tradition had not gripped the public’s imagination like the cinematic images of a defeated, prostrate South. Americans, as filmmakers know, like an underdog, and the glamorous South of legend, its history sanitized by sentimentality, was especially sympathetic. A third tradition, the Emancipation Cause, defined the fighting as a means to liberate millions of slaves, while the Reconciliation Cause emphasized the native virtues shared by both contestants in an attempt to bring the regional rivals together in a show of unity on a national stage. Both the Union and Emancipation traditions have enjoyed a surge in popularity in recent years through such notable feature films as Glory, a 1989 release that showcased the exploits of the 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, a unit made up of rank-and-file African-American soldiers.

Northerners have long been repelled and fascinated by the Old South. They grabbed up the his-

Northerners have long been repelled and fascinated by the Old South.

GALLAGHER REVIEW

torical romances published in the decades leading up to the Civil War by the popular South Carolina novelist William Gilmore Simms and, after Appomattox, the novels and short stories by the Virginia writers Thomas Nelson Page and John Esten Cooke, among others. These writings were influenced by and perpetuated the romantic tradition exemplified by the works of Sir Walter Scott. The success of the plantation novel, with its depiction of genteel Southern society, inspired countless imitators, shaping the image of the South for the rest of the country.

Although Gallagher’s subject is not the literary traditions that produced the popular stereotype of an idealized South populated by ladies fair and chivalric knights to whom personal honor and social order were paramount, it is readily apparent that this paradigm, implanted in the culture by 1861 and promoted in literary works after the war, not only provided an artistic parallel to the pronouncements of Lost Cause essayists and historians, but also, indeed, had preceded them and influenced their own perceptions of the society in which they lived. These writers’ assumptions conformed to the literary landscape in which they lived and matured, and in their hands Robert E. Lee and other Southern military figures became living embodiments of a heroic tradition almost medieval in nature. Early in the twentieth century, it was convenient for filmmakers to transfer these symbols and their familiar message into an exciting new medium.

Since the release of Glory, the Emancipation Cause tradition has held sway, with only the production of Gods and Generals (2003) harking back to the familiar pattern of previous films. Meanwhile, contemporary Civil War paintings and sculptures continue to mine Lost Cause themes, profitably concentrating on images of the heroic South while consigning the triumphant North to a distinctly secondary position. Union Cause advocates had reason to celebrate in 2003, however, when, despite protests, a statue of Abraham Lincoln and his son Tad was erected at Richmond’s historic Tredegar iron-works.

Civil War buffs and film enthusiasts alike will find much of interest in this engaging study of how contemporary art reflects on and contributes to the continuing struggle to interpret and understand the meaning of the American Civil War.

—reviewed by Donald W. Gunter, assistant editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography

Michael Ayers Trotti. The Body in the Reservoir: Murder and Sensationalism in the South. Chapel Hill: Univer-
This well-written account of several sensational murders and their associated trials focuses on Richmond, Virginia, between the Civil War and World War I. Michael Ayers Trotti is the third historian to write an important book about crime and Virginia during that time; Suzanne Lebsock’s Murder in Virginia: Southern Justice on Trial (2003) and Richard F. Hamm’s Murder, Honor, and Law: Four Virginia Homicides from Reconstruction to the Great Depression (2003) explore issues of race, class, honor, and the law in Virginia by examining murders and duels and their consequences. Add to them James M. Campbell’s Slavery on Trial: Race, Class, and Criminal Justice in Antebellum Richmond, Virginia (2007), which treats antebellum Virginia law and slavery, and suddenly the library shelves contain excellent scholarship that unravels how various groups of Virginians dealt with and reacted to deadly crime.

Trotti’s study goes further. His book is also about the popular culture associated with violence and with sensationalism. It is very much a book about how journalism, particularly technological and commercial changes in newspaper publication, as well as popular tastes and expectations, transformed the ways in which people learned and thought about crimes of violence and the people who committed them. At the heart of the change was sensational newspaper coverage—what came to be called, during the time Trotti considers, “yellow journalism.”

Trotti draws important lessons from the dramatic differences between the manner in which murders, trials, and executions were reported in the 1860s and the manner in which they were reported in the 1910s. Whatever claims to better taste or more refinement white ladies and gentlemen in antebellum Virginia may have once made, during the first half-century after the Civil War they became just as crass as they believed people were everywhere. In that regard, the changes in newspapers and in the public’s taste for sensational journalism indicate how very different old Virginia and its inhabitants had become by the twentieth century.

—reviewed by Brent Tarter, editor, Dictionary of Virginia Biography

Call for Reviewers

The “Virginia Reviews” column has been an important part of Virginia Libraries since it was undertaken by the Library of Virginia’s Publications Department in the early 1990s. It was begun by Sandra Treadway, the current librarian of Virginia, in response to a suggestion from Peggie Rudd, now the Texas state librarian. John Kneebone was the first editor of “Virginia Reviews,” and he has been succeeded by Julie Campbell and eventually Sara Bearss. The reviews have maintained a very high standard of scholarship over the years, and have allowed us to publish the work of many talented LVA staff members.

We have recently learned that staff reductions will force LVA to eliminate the production of “Virginia Reviews” as an assignment for the publications staff. This is disappointing because we will lose a reliable, well-written feature that could be useful to almost every reader our journal reaches; however, it does present the opportunity to broaden the participation in the book review column we will be developing in 2009. Therefore, we are inviting potential reviewers to contact both Lyn C. A. Gardner (cgardner@hampton.gov) and Cy Dillon (cdillon@ferrum.edu) with proposals for reviews or simply to say you are willing to submit reviews in the future.

While we want potential reviewers to make themselves familiar with the length, diction, and style of the reviews from this and past issues, we also want to extend the scope of the books reviewed in Virginia Libraries beyond historical works to include fiction, poetry, and nonfiction works set in Virginia or by Virginia authors. The editors plan to include children’s books, young adult literature, and even graphic novels that are candidates for library collections around the Old Dominion. At this point, we are not yet able to offer review copies, but we hope that our readers, as librarians, will have access to most new publications.

Become a participant in the acquisitions decisions of the Virginia library community. Become a reviewer for Virginia Libraries.