

Purpose of MHA Docents Committee

The purpose of the Mecklenburg Historical Association Docent Committee shall be to assist with the promotion and implementation of the objectives of the Mecklenburg Historical Association, Inc. as outlined in Article 2 of its By-laws (with particular attention to the selected sections below) and also to:

1. Encourage docents to volunteer at regional historic sites.
2. Develop training programs and/or train volunteers for regional historic sites.
3. Conduct research in order to enhance the Committee's general knowledge of the region's history, with a view towards publishing or otherwise presenting such knowledge to the public.
4. Seek other areas of opportunity, when appropriate.

Selected sections of Article II of MHA Objectives pertinent to the MHA Docents Committee

Section 1 To endeavor to bring together those persons most interested in the history of Mecklenburg County and by their united efforts undertake to provide a thorough, widely diffused knowledge of the history of the County.

Section 3 To encourage exhaustive historic research to the end that an accurate and detailed permanent record shall be made of the various phases of the history of Mecklenburg County.

Section 4 To write or have written and publish or have published books, pamphlets, brochures, leaflets and articles; to offer the same for sale to the public; to provide historical data and/or literature for free distribution to schools, libraries, organizations and individuals; and when advisable secure copyrights on publications.

Section 5 To encourage the preservation of historic buildings, objects, and antiques throughout the County.

Section 7 To endeavor in every way feasible to promote interest and pride in the history of Mecklenburg County.

Section 8 To cooperate in every way practicable with all other historic and patriotic organizations.

From the Queen...

Dear Docents,

I hope that your holidays were the best ever! During the days between our Christmas Tea and December 21st, I "morphed" from Queen to Granny – the reverse "morph" is not nearly so easy! I do hope no parts were lost in the process. My house was full of all sorts of Christmas gift bionicals and maybe some trionicals, I'm not sure. The things children play with today are amazing! We had a really good time Christmas Eve– we gathered with neighbors in the traffic circle on our street and sang a few carols. My 13-year-old grandson played his French Horn and it was a wonderful sound on a clear, cool evening.

And so two thousand and four is here. When you make your resolutions remember to include your service to your favorite historic site, MHA, and the Docents in particular. This could be our best year! As the Executive Board plans to go on Retreat, recruitment is on the front burner. If you know of someone who might be interested in joining in a training class, please let us know. Our January 6 program will review the past year by way of Committee reports. This is always fun, so try to be at Rosedale at 9:30. I'll see you there.

Rachel



Program Schedule

Refreshments 9:30 am — Meeting 10:00 am — Program 11:00 am

- January 6* Yearly report and installation of Officers
- February 3* Historical Railroad Society will speak about the importance and influence of the railroad's arrival in our region.
- March 2* Alice Bostic will inform us about the Lutheran Church, which was significant in the Piedmont in the early days.
- April 6* Walter Klein will educate us about the Masonic Order, its affect on community life, and the allegiance to this order.
- May 4* Pat Veasey, curator for the sampler exhibit, "Virtue Leads and Grace Reveals," will talk about the exhibit, giving special attention to the samplers created by school girls with Mecklenburg County connections.
- June 1* Picnic

In Memoriam

Mary Jane McKee Alexander

The board of directors, staff and volunteers of Historic Rosedale were truly saddened by the loss of one of its most active volunteers, Jane Alexander. Jane passed away in October after a brief battle with cancer.

Charlotte Observer 10/16/2003: "She was born in Charlotte, NC, on November 5, 1939, and was the daughter of the late William N. McKee and Christine E. McKee. She graduated from East Mecklenburg High School and then Charlotte Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in 1961. She worked at many area hospitals including Rowan Memorial, Carolinas Medical Center and Presbyterian Hospital. She was a dedicated wife, mother and nurse. She was a lifelong member of Providence Presbyterian Church where she served in many offices and was named a Lifetime Member of the Presbyterian Women of the church. Jane enjoyed spending time with her children and grandchildren, traveling especially to the North Carolina coast, and gardening. She enjoyed serving as a docent at Rosedale Plantation."

Jane served as a volunteer at Rosedale for a short time, but had endeared herself to us quickly with her kind and generous spirit. She was awarded "Rookie of the Year" as a first year docent in 2002. She helped with school tours, public tours, research and special events. We will all remember her great work as narrator of "To Dress A Lady" in April of this past year.

We will miss her greatly and remember her fondly. She has a special place in our history.

What is Twelfth Night

Submitted by Nancy Follette

Charlotte Museum of History/Hezekiah Alexander Homesite

This year, for the first time, the Hezekiah Alexander Homesite will be celebrating Twelfth Night. Why would we do that? Many historians believe that the colonists celebrated Twelfth Night more often than Christmas. It is not that they did not recognize Christmas, but December 25 was considered a holy day. If celebrated at all, it was done so in church or in prayer. The period of time after Christmas, however, was a grander time of celebration, especially for those with English roots. How did this all come to be?



What is Twelfth Night
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First we must discuss the origins of Christmas. The Roman Catholic Church conceived Christmas in the 4th century to coincide (compete?) with the pagan festival of Saturnalia and the winter solstice festivals. By proclaiming December 25 as the “birthday of Jesus,” the Feast of the Nativity, it was hoped that people would turn from the pagan traditions and spend more time in spiritual reflection – a celebration of the “Son,” not the “Sun.” The Eastern Church quickly picked this up and added the Feast of the Epiphany. The Epiphany was celebrated on January 6, the date the Eastern Church celebrated the Baptism of Jesus. This was also the date that the pagans believed that their own gods made themselves human. The Roman Church preferred to concentrate on the incarnation and divinity of Christ, so they recast the Epiphany to commemorate the adoration of the Magi (also known as “Three Kings Day”). For centuries there was conflict between the churches as to the true meaning of these religious festivals and the dates they should be celebrated. In the 9th century, however, King Alfred of England passed a law proclaiming the celebration of Christmas from December 25 (Feast of the Nativity – Birth of Christ) until January 6 (Feast of the Epiphany – Arrival of the Wise Men). This celebration is what we refer to now as the Twelve Days of Christmas. The last night of the celebration is Twelfth Night.

We must keep in mind, as we move our thoughts forward in time to how the colonists may have celebrated Twelfth Night, that America was a collection of separate colonies (and states, after independence) that rarely interacted. They did not have a single common calendar until the 19th century. The years changed with the seasons; full moons dictated the passing of months. They shared no national holidays. Celebrations tended to be more community-focused. In Puritan New England, very little celebrating was done at all. There were some religious holidays, but even then the days were spent in prayer. Southern colonies, however, continued to commemorate many of the English holidays that the Puritans had disdained. There are written accounts of Lady Day, Shrovetide, Lent, Easter, Easter Monday, Midsummer's Day, Michaelmas, and Hock Thursday, as well as Christmas Day.

And then there's Twelfth Night. This was a celebration to bid farewell to the winter's religious season. In 1740 William Byrd wrote that he spent Twelfth Night reading Hebrew and Greek and playing billiards. After dinner, he “*talked to my people, drew twelfth cake, gave the people cake and cider, and prayed.*” George Washington married Martha on “*Twelfth Night or ‘Old Christmas Eve’ in 1759.*” In 1774, an English traveler attended a Scots-Irish Twelfth Night Ball in Alexandria, Virginia.

So, how would the Alexanders have celebrated? Almost every celebration seemed to follow the same routine. There would be feasting and drinking and visiting with friends and family. Twelfth Night did seem to present two very unique means of celebration – the Twelfth Night Ball and the Twelfth Night cake. The cake, sometimes referred to as the “Cake of the Kings,” was generally quite elaborately decorated. Baked inside was a bean or a pea. The person finding it would be the king or queen of the ball. In some traditions, the finder of the bean or pea became the host of the next year's Twelfth Night Ball! Sharing of the festive wassail bowl of hot spiced ale was also a treat during the twelve days of Christmas. Each guest would cry, “Wassail,” meaning, “Here's to you” or “To your health.” Sometimes young men would go from house to house during the twelve days of Christmas with wassail bowls singing carols and hoping for treats. In some rural areas, men would fire shotguns into the air – a magical rite to frighten away the evil spirits.

As we celebrate Twelfth Night at the Hezekiah Alexander Homesite, we will be attempting to recreate a celebration from our past. Its richness perhaps will not be in its historical accuracy, but rather in honoring the traditions that warmed the hearts of our ancestors, as well as renewing the spirit of those who remain a part of us even today.

Journal Committee Update

Submitted by Karen McConnell

A five-year project of the Journal Committee of the MHA Docents has been the transcription and annotation of a journal written by Miss Sarah Frew Davidson of Charlotte in the year 1837. The following is an introduction to the journal as written by the committee. The committee hopes to eventually have the journal published. Members of MHA Docents Book Club are currently reading the transcription. Please join us for discussions of this journal at the next Docent Book Club meeting on January 6.

Karen M. McConnell

Janet Dyer

Ann Williams

Introduction

Sarah Frew Davidson began her journal in January of the year 1837. She was an unmarried lady of thirty-three years and lived with her widowed father on his Mecklenburg County plantation called The Grove, about three miles northwest of Charlotte, North Carolina. Charlotte was a village then, about a square mile in size, home to about eight hundred inhabitants. Most of Mecklenburg's people were farmers, scattered about the countryside. According to the tax list of 1840, Charlotte had twelve stores, one bank agent, three taverns, one tannery, one printing office, one weekly paper, two academies, one common school, two ministers, six lawyers, six doctors, four mines, and fifty mechanics. Personal property listed included thirteen pleasure carriages, eighty-three gold watches, thirty-eight silver watches, and twenty-four pianos. Sarah's closest friends lived within the bounds of the village.

Gold mining was the principle business of the town. In 1799 gold was discovered in neighboring Cabarrus County. By the 1830s there were a number of gold mines in Mecklenburg and the surrounding counties. In 1837 a branch of the U. S. Mint was opened to assay ore and mint coins. Mining and the mint flourished until a far richer lode was discovered in California in 1848.

As a young girl Sarah attended the Raleigh Academy, a female boarding school. Among her teachers was Mrs. Susan Nye Hutchinson. By 1837 Mrs. Hutchinson had been hired to instruct at the Salisbury Female Academy about forty miles from Charlotte. She renewed her friendship with several of her former pupils in the Charlotte area, and it was at the urging of Mrs. Hutchinson that Sarah wrote her journal. Its purpose was self-examination and reflection as well as keeping a record of daily life.

A religious revival swept the south in the early 1800s, and many upper-class southern women experienced spiritual rebirth. The journal served Sarah Davidson as a tool in her personal journey as an evangelical Christian lady typical of her time and class, and records her move toward the church and spiritual pursuits. Sarah expressively describes her "awakening" to Christ's call in the early chapters of her journal, and acknowledges The Rev. Robert Hall Morrison, a Presbyterian minister, as the instrument of that awakening. As an evangelical Christian woman, her faith provided a rich personal experience and a need to scrutinize her thoughts and emotions. Indeed examination of feelings, desires, and motives was encouraged by the church, which deemed man unworthy, and subject to salvation only through the grace of God. Her spiritual journey, so eloquently explored through her writings, is representative of many wealthy southern women of her time.

The revival seemed to have been less successful with male members of the ante-bellum society who clung to their understanding of religion focusing on reason and avoiding the more emotional aspects of the evangelical church. Sarah, while always the submissive daughter, piously tried to win her father and brother away from popular vices and zealously endeavored to convert her "lost" family and friends in order to save them from an eternity of damnation.



Sarah worshiped with the Presbyterians of the village of Charlotte when her journal was written. She later became a member of the Episcopal congregation that at that time worshiped in conjunction with the Presbyterians. In 1837 Dr. Morrison took the position of president of the newly opened Davidson College, and the young Rev. Abner Leavenworth, a Presbyterian minister, served both congregations. The Reverend Leavenworth garnered much praise and admiration from the devout Sarah. The church building, which stood where First Presbyterian stands today, was constructed by the community and was used for worship by many denominations during Charlotte's early years. The Presbyterian congregation, the largest one and the only one with a full time minister, paid the debt on the building and took over ownership in 1832. Most local denominations continued to use the church for worship services. Sarah attended services of all denominations held at the church, but her opinion of the ministers varied greatly.

As a member of the gentry class, Miss Davidson demonstrated her position in society through her dress, manner of conversation, and her physical bearing. In a position of wealth and leisure, slave-holding women of the old south had much time for social occasions and frivolous activities. The church, however, urged their female members to spend their time in more righteous pursuits. Religious writers of the time condemned popular social pastimes such as balls, parties, and socializing as wasteful and distracting, and encouraged women to better spend their time tending to domestic and spiritual obligations. Although Sarah found much pleasure in social occasions and especially spending time with friends and family, she often chastised herself for deriving such pleasure from these frivolous encounters. Christian women were encouraged by spiritual leaders to seek charitable pursuits such as Sunday Schools and Benevolent societies. Soon after her spiritual awakening, Miss Davidson and a few of her friends committed to reestablish Sabbath schools in the village of Charlotte. Sarah also joined the Benevolent Society. These activities helped assuage her guilt and provided her with an acceptable outlet for her time and energy.

Her father, the former Senator William Davidson, owned a large plantation called The Grove. It was one of Mecklenburg's largest plantations, and was located off Beatties Ford Road in the present day Hoskins community. The senator raised cotton, operated a Gold mine, and raised crops to support his family and slaves. It was The Grove that Sarah called home. The three miles to town was no obstacle for Sarah as she traveled to the village several times a week and always on Sunday. She often rode horseback, which she greatly enjoyed, or walked or traveled in a carriage on these frequent trips. Her sister and brother-in-law, Margaret and James H. Blake, lived in a Davidson home on the southwest corner of the village square, directly across from the Court House; Sarah resided with them while in the village. Today Thomas Polk Park occupies the site of the former Davidson home.

In the absence of her mother, Sarah acted as Mistress at The Grove, supervising and instructing the slaves as well as providing for their needs. Her commitment to bringing others to Christ extended to the slaves owned by her father, which in the year 1837 numbered around eighty. Sarah felt that teaching the younger slaves to read was instrumental in directing the spiritual lives of "her people." She struggled with obedience to God and the law that forbade anyone teaching slaves to read. It was a relatively new law, having been enacted in North Carolina in 1831. She concluded that her higher allegiance was to God and with her father's consent, began classes for her young slaves in which she taught them to read the Bible, and instructed them in its meaning.

James K. Polk Volunteer Training

New Volunteer Training will be held at the James K Polk site over three Mondays in February – February 2, 9 and 23 – from 10 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Please contact Carolyn Dilda at the Polk site at 704- 889-7145 if interested.

Explore Charlotte History!

Historic Charlotte, Levine Museum of the New South and Central Piedmont Community College invite you on a fun-filled exploration of our city's past. We'll share stories of Queen Charlotte and mysterious Sharon (of Sharon Road), gold miners and cotton mill hands, bankers and immigrants, Bill Monroe and Billy Graham. Perfect for both newcomers and long-time Charlotteans!

This CPCC personal interest course is being held at Levine Museum of the New South over three Saturday sessions: March 20, March 27 and April 3 from 10 a.m.–12 noon. The course number is CAS 7001-01 and the cost is only \$30. The Museum is located at 200 East Seventh Street. Parking is free on Saturdays in the adjacent Seventh Street Parking Deck and participants are welcome to visit the museum exhibits after class.

For registration or questions visit the CPCC Website at www.cpcctraining.org/personal_interest or contact CPCC Customer Service at 704-330-4223.

For more information, please contact Historic Charlotte at 704-375-6145.

Historic Rosedale Plantation

Calendar of Events

January 10, 17, 24, 31 — Volunteer Training Classes: If you have a fascination with the past (or know someone who does) and enjoy learning about how our ancestors lived, join us at Historic Rosedale. Our enthusiastic volunteers learn to research, teach, and share the secrets of Charlotte's past. Help us share the lessons of the past on Rosedale's special tours including Plantation Tour, Children's Plantation Tour and Unheard Voices Tour. We've got a great job for you! Call 704-335-0325 for details.

February 1 at 1:00, 2:00, and 3:00 — Focused Tour, *Unheard Voices*: White plantation owners and their families left many documents and papers to tell of their lives, while the unheard voices of the enslaved Africans who spent their lives toiling the red clay of the piedmont Carolina are seldom heard. This tour is designed to examine the personal and work life of 20 slaves that inhabited the Caldwell Plantation of the early 1800's.

April 25, 1:00 until 4:00 — *The Sale*: A dramatic event dealing with the public sale of the Frew plantation to pay the taxes of Mecklenburg County in the year 1819. This extraordinary event in the life of the citizens of Mecklenburg County, the Frew family, and the enslaved African-Americans of the plantation, provides an excellent opportunity to explore the history of the region and the lives of our ancestors.

Historical Cooking Guild

Submitted by Barbara Goodwin

This year the MHA Annual Holiday Tea, planned with participation of the Historical Cooking Guild, included historical foods representing our local sites. Recipes were provided to Docents who wished to prepare an old recipe. These historical foods were grouped on the table with names and dates. They included Hezekiah Alexander Shortbread, Historic Rosedale Jumbals, Jane Latta Gingercake, and Margaret Allison Torrance Gingerbread. Docents also made Snowballs, Brandy Snaps, Whiskey Nut Balls, Aunt Sam's Strawberries, Pumpkin Break, and Mushroom Savories. Docents and guests enjoyed this historical touch with their tea.

News from Mint Hill Country Doctor's Museum and Ira V. Ferguson Store

Submitted by Violet Hartis

The Mint Hill Country Doctor's Musuem and Ira V. Ferguson Store and Gift Shoppe will have its next public opening on the Second Sunday of January, 2004, from 2:00–5:00 p.m. Our focus for the day will be 19th century dentistry, with a display of instruments and a dentist on site to answer questions. Private tours are available by calling 705–573–0726. The museums are locate on Hillside drive just off Highway 51.

MHA Dues 2004

MHA dues are due January 1 each year. Please make checks payable to *MHA Docents*. Give the check to Valerie Jones, docent treasurer, at the monthly meeting, or mail to:

Valerie Jones
4700 Coronado Drive
Charlotte, NC 28212

Questions? Call Valerie at 704–567–0599.

Levels of MHA Membership

	<u>Single</u>	<u>Couple</u>
General	\$25.00	\$45.00
Senior (over 60)	\$12.50	\$20.00
Patron	\$50.00	\$90.00
Life (single payment)	\$300.00	\$500.00
Student	free	n/a

Latta Plantations Hosts Backcountry Life Skills Workshops

Submitted by Wanda Hubicki

Historic Latta Plantation will host a series of workshops in Backcountry Life Skills in the new year. D. Ann Gill and Robert W. Likas (Hawkeye) have volunteered to lead these workshops to instruct volunteers at historic sites and Girl Scout and Boy Scout leaders in skills they can share with others. Hawkeye practices and teaches the skills of the past, including primitive, survival, and wilderness living skills practiced by Native Americans and aboriginal peoples all over the world. He has been teaching for more than 25 years. Ann has been studying and practicing these same traditions for more than ten years. She specializes in fiber skills and the study of native plants. Together, Ann and Hawkeye founded the Tacachale Programs (www.tacachale.org) to pass on their knowledge and skills to others.

All workshops take place at Historic Latta Plantation on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Each class has an advance registration fee of \$5. Two have material fees, as specified. Participants must be 15 years of age or older and are asked to bring a lunch and drink for themselves. The minimum number required per workshop is ten participants; the maximum will be thirty.

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Latta Plantations Hosts Backcountry Life Skills Workshops

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FIRE STARTING: January 17, 2004; rain date is January 24, 2004

Advance registration fee: \$5

Materials fee: \$15; includes flint & steel and starting material

Instructor: Robert Likas

By the end of the day, participants will become proficient in starting fires with flint and steel. Other methods of fire starting, such as friction and use of magnifying lenses, will be demonstrated.

METAL TOOLS 101: February 14, 2004

Advance registration fee: \$5;

Materials fee: None

Instructor: Robert Likas

This workshop will cover knives and period agricultural and woodworking tools. Aspects to be addressed include: basic metals composition, types of blades, and the care, maintenance, and safe use of period tools. Participants are asked to bring an assortment of knives and old agricultural or woodworking tools to sharpen; bring a whetstone, if possible.

GOURDS 101: March 13, 2004

Advance registration fee: \$5.

Materials fee: To be determined by cost to instructor

Instructor: D. Ann Likas

This workshop will instruct participants on the traditional uses of gourds as containers and instruments, etc. It will cover cleaning gourds, carving and opening them for various uses, and cleaning the interior to remove bitterness.

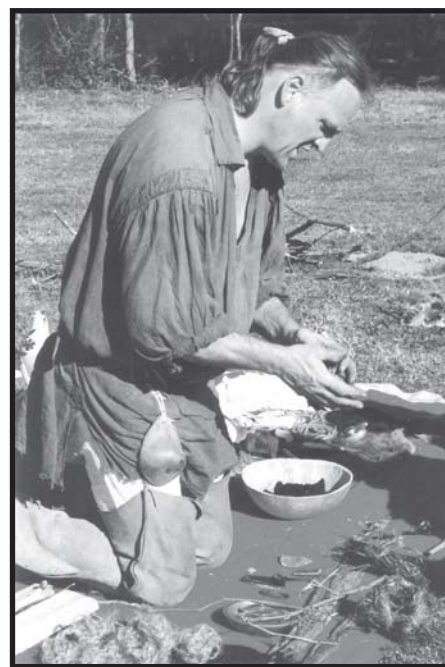
NATIVE PLANTS FOR FOOD AND MEDICINE: April 24, 2004

Advance registration fee: \$5

Materials fee: None

Instructor: D. Ann Likas

Workshop participants will take a walk in the Latta Plantation Nature Preserve to identify some of the plants that Europeans saw when they first arrived in the backcountry. Participants will learn which habitats support native plants and the ways in which native plants are used both as food and medicine.



To receive a brochure or to register for any of these workshops, please Call Wanda Hubicki at 704-563-7080 or email whubicki@lattaplantation.org.

Historic Latta Plantation is located at 5225 Sample Road (off Beatties Ford Road) in Huntersville, NC (www.lattaplantation.org).

MHA Docents Board

Chairman	Rachel Abernathy	Secretary	Pam Dudeck
Vice Chairmen	Lisa Tappy	Treasurer	Valerie Jones

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Corresponding Secretary	Betty Pierce	704-399-5308
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	Barbara Goodwin	704-821-4810
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	Barbara Goodwin	704-821-4810
Decorative Arts Survey	Linda Dalton	704-364-7435
	Jane Estep	704-541-5011
MHA Training Class	Karen McConnell	704-797-8694

*Life in the 1500s***Submitted by Lisa Tappy**

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a "wake."

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or the "upper crust."

Baths equalled a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually loose someone in it. Hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, hence the saying "dirt poor." The wealthy had slate floors which would get slippery in the winter when wet. So they spread thresh on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on they kept adding more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed at the entry way, hence a "thresh hold."