

VMI Museum System Report to the VMI Board of Visitors

September 2024, Executive Summary

The three sites of the VMI Museum System— The VMI Museum, Jackson House Museum and the Virginia Museum of the Civil War (New Market Battlefield)—have enjoyed a busy and rewarding summer. A number of special activities, groups and after hours events highlight our report.

Under the direction of COL Gibson, the staff continues to work on the program and facility planning of CLE II which will house the VMI Museum, among other functions.

Effective July 1, the VMI Museum instituted a fee schedule for admission to museum— Adult \$8, Senior \$6; Youth 6-12, \$5, There are a number of categories of patrons who receive free admission: Alumni, Cadets (and parents when accompanied by a cadet), Prospective cadets and parents, VMI employees and local residents. In addition, the museum will have free weekends during alumni weekends and home football games. The program has been well received and generated over \$10,000 in the first two months.

Two important paintings from the VMI collection were restored this summer by art conservators at the Richmond Conservation Studio. *Cliffs at North River* by VMI faculty William D. Washington, one of the most important mid-19th century artist working in Virginia, and *George C. Marshall, VMI 1901* by Leslie Emery. The portrait was a project of the 1942 WPA program.

The VMI Museum System participated in the VMI Matriculation Fair once again this year. VMIM Store Manager Lisa French, JHM Store Manager Janet Hughes, and volunteer Melissa Greer welcomed cadets and their families, highlighting the offerings and significance of the Museum System.

On Saturday, August 24, the VMI Museum System took part in the 48th Annual Rockbridge Community Festival hosting a booth dedicated to promoting the Museum System and showcasing the programs available to the local community. Around 350 people attending the event met with our staff and volunteers.

VMI Museum

May 20th Washington & Lee Professor Samantha Kang's *Religion and Tourism* class visited the VMI Museum and the Jackson House to view items considered relics in the museum collection and participated in a discussion with Col. Gibson about visiting historic sites as a form of pilgrimage.

June 6th The VMI Museum received the casket flag from the Normandy burial of Benjamin Rives Kearfott, VMI 1943. Kearfott was killed leading his men ashore during the first wave of the D-Day Landing, June 6, 1944. The flag arrived at the VMI Museum on June 6, 2024 — exactly 80 years to the day after Lt. Kearfott's sacrifice.

June 17th VMI Museum System staff took a 'working' field trip to James Madison's Montpelier and James Monroe's Highland to learn more about how public history is interpreted within historic houses, enslaved quarters, and gardens. In between tours was a lunch break at Historic Michie Tavern.

July 2nd MG William "Razz" Waff, VMI 1976, donated two Silver Lifesaving medals for the Hall of Valor shadowboxes of George S. Patton, Jr., VMI 1907, and Richard E. Byrd, VMI 1908.

July 18th The VMI Museum was the location for the Lexington Chamber of Commerce to host their “Business After Hours” event, which includes members and business owners.

July 25th The Museum hosted the Society for Military History summer session closing reception and dinner.

Jackson House Museum

May 20th The Rockbridge Area Master Gardener Association hosted a Water Quality and Conservation lab in the Jackson House Museum Garden. Shawn Jadrnicek, an Extension Agent with the Virginia Cooperative Extension Office, led a discussion on best practices for utilizing rain barrels and drip irrigation systems. This event coincided with the installation of a rain barrel in the garden, a practice commonly employed in the 19th century and possibly used during the Jacksons' residence.

Month of May- The Jackson House Museum participated in the "Window on Main Street" initiative to promote visitation to the museum. This promotional effort, offered free of charge through Main Street Lexington, aimed to increase public awareness and engagement with the Jackson House Museum.

July 1st - The Jackson House has extended its operating hours. As of July 1, the museum has reopened to the public on Mondays, following a reduction in staffing during the COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in a five-day week schedule. The museum is now open Monday through Saturday, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

July 19th - The Jackson House hosted “Thirsty Thursday,” an evening event for local VMI alumni. Scott Risser, '75, the local chapter president, and volunteer at the Jackson

Upcoming Events at the Jackson House:

October 5, from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM. **Apple Day will be held on Saturday**, This 40-year-old tradition takes place in front of the Jackson House on Washington Street., Free and open to the public, the event features crafts, games, dancing, and storytelling. Our Master Cider Maker will conduct demonstrations using a 19th-century cider press in the garden.

December 15 from 5pm – 7pm. **Christmas at the Jacksons'** will be on Sunday. Visitors enjoy an evening candlelit tour of the house while interacting with characters from 1859 to learn about Christmas in the mid-1800s.

Virginia Museum of the Civil War, New Market Battlefield State Historical Park

Group attendance continues to rebound from COVID with– 1,072 total group visitors between April and May.

May 8th – Town and County Dinner – 70 in attendance to include Col Gibson, Col Boobar, BG Clarke

May 13th - The museum store experienced a major upgrade with new cabinets and lighting. With VMI consent, the Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation removed wire fence between our properties and scrub trees along the Collins Parkway. They have now installed about ³/₄ mile of split rail fencing which enhance the visitor experience tremendously.

May 14th -Hired Phoebe Cox as our Historical Interpreter/Office Aide.

June 18th – Cadet Ebenezer Abebressor, VMI 2027, an Economics major from Stafford, VA., began scholar in residence program.

June 27th – Shenandoah Valley Partnership Networking Event – Around 50 in attendance to include Col Boobar and BG Clark

July 7th-18th - young people participated in the 2024 Civil War Day Camp (an increase over 2023) Civil War Day Camp. Camper's mother attended the popular week-long program in 2002!

July 13th – Col Gibson provided a guided tour to 20 college history professors who are attending a month-long workshop conducted by the Marshall Foundation on teaching military history in the college classroom.

August 8th – Installation began on a new EPDM roof on the Virginia Museum of the Civil War building (the Hall of Valor.) The emergency project was undertaken after a partial failure during a wind and rain event earlier in the summer. The roof replaces an EPDM roof dating to the mid-1990s.

Recent Acquisitions of Note:

2024.0006: George “Donny” Hasseltine, VMI 1997, donated a first-run swatch of tartan to the museum, as well as three letters from tartan designer Donald Fraser of Scotland regarding the design.

2024.0008: 1928 & 1929 State Championship pennant donated by Cameron Thompson.

2024.0018.001: V.M.I. FINAL GERMAN '11 marshal sash worn by Kinsley McWhorter, VMI 1911, donated by his granddaughter Lynn McWhorter Speno.

2024.0022.001-.002: Gates Richards, VMI 1961, donated a *Brother Rat* doll which still has its original tag and a signed copy of the bound script.

2024.0023: The coatee of Virginia Grace Townsend, VMI 2024, VMI's first female valedictorian.

2024.0028: Transferred from the Smithsonian Institute Museum of Natural History, several samples of clothing, hair, and bones of Claudius Crozet (1789-1864) recovered from the iron casket of Crozet by Dr. Doug Owsley, Forensic Anthropologist, Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, during an extensive examination and analysis in October 2006.

2024.0031: Wooden VMI Class of 1990 ring carved by the late Ronald E. Buxton (Bucky), VMI 1990, donated by Barry Johnson, VMI 1990

2024.0033: Charles Ward, VMI 1974 and wife Louise donated an ivory satin Ring Figure dress. Louis made the dress herself.

2024.0038: Items from the Special Forces career of Radoslaw ‘Spud’ Szczepanski, VMI 1987, who served in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

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