

# VMI Museum System Report to the Board of Visitors

February 2025  
Col. Keith Gibson, Director



*Artifact # 2024.0060: A rare white VMI uniform cover with distinctive hat shield worn by Cadet Sherwood Franklin, VMI 1949A. This unusual VMI cover was worn for a very short time and only with the white "paltot" blouse. Donated by his daughter, Lynda Talerico.*

## Academic Support for Cadets and Beyond...

**VMI HISTORY 367R-01 History of VMI 1839-2039:** Dr. Erin Holmes' class visited the museum. Cadets learned the principles of historical thinking to understand how VMI has influenced, or been influenced by, major historical events. Some of the topics include: the commemoration of the Civil War and the Lost Cause; the introduction of ROTC programs; and 20th-century wars.

**VMI CHEM 125 Metals Lab:** Lt. Col. Kevin Braun brought his chemistry students over for their CHEM 125 metals lab with museum registrar Cathy DeSilvey. During the lab, cadets analyze 2-3 of the 'unidentified' artifacts and use their knowledge to determine the material, the technology used to make the artifact, its purpose, and age. Cadets also compare items from different cultures and why certain materials were chosen. At the conclusion of the lab, the cadets learn how accurate their observations are. (Imagine their reactions when we told them that our Javanese kris' (dagger) wavy blade contained metal from a meteorite! Other items included an Abyssinian sword, a gold-plated AK-47 magazine, a samurai sword, and a double-scabbard sword from China.

**VMI CHEM 492 Chemical Archaeology Class:** Lt. Col. Kevin Braun's CH492 Chemical Archeology class came to the museum to conduct follow-up arsenic testing on the hide of Little Sorrel. Before 1980 arsenic was used as a preservative on taxidermized animals, and Braun had previously tested the hide. The cadets also tested the saddle blanket and saddle that were displayed on Little Sorrel years ago.



*Professors Erin Holmes and Kevin Braun brought their History and Chemistry classes, respectively, to the museum for memorable applications of their classroom instruction.*



### **New Market Battlefield Staff Ride for VMI Cadets,**

**October 26:** Conducted by COL Keith Gibson and Professor Erin Holmes, a dozen cadets participated in a day-long deep examination of the opening weeks of the 1864 Campaign in the Valley, focusing on the Battle of New Market. A highlight of the day was the training and firing by each cadet of a Civil War era rifled musket.

**WLU HIST 269:** W&L professor Dr. Samantha Rosenthal’s HIST 269: Introduction to Public History class visited and received an introduction by Col. Gibson who discussed the ways in which the museum interprets and displays items to the public.

### **Professional Museum Collaboration...**

**National Museum of the U.S. Army Loan:** We welcomed NMUSA Chief Curator Paul Morando and Roger Wright, Exhibits Coordinator for the Department of Defense. The VMI Museum is loaning to the NMUSA a Model 1763 French Charleville flintlock musket for their upcoming exhibit “*Call to Arms: The Soldier and the Revolutionary War.*” The exhibit opens 14 June 2025 and runs through 14 June 2027.

**Inclusive History Training:** In the fall of 2024, VMI staff and faculty were invited to participate in a grant-funded 12-week remote learning certificate-granting course on Inclusive History, an initiative of the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund. Museum system staff members Cathy DeSilvey, Museum System Registrar, Sarah Hebert, Asst. Site Director, **Virginia Museum of the Civil War**, and Kristin Pace, Asst. Site Director, **Jackson House Museum**, joined a cohort of VMI professors and archivists in the immersive experience. Using research and information from the report *Slavery at VMI*, and conducting further research, the participants are collaborating on a project that will culminate in a webpage on the VMI website about the use of enslaved labor at VMI and their identities.

**Augusta County Historical Society Loan:** The VMI Museum loaned several artifacts to the Augusta County Historical Society for their exhibit opening this Friday, September 6th: “Voices from the Blue Ridge Tunnel: When Men were Machines.” Our connection is that French engineer Claudius Crozet was directly involved with the founding of VMI and the first President of the VMI Board of Visitors. Items on loan include picks, hand drills, and a sledge hammer used to chip away at the mountain.

### **Hosting and Consultation with Visiting Professionals...**

**Bronze Conservator Steve Roy visits Post:** Steve Roy performed exterior bronze maintenance on the bronze statues on Post.



VMI cadets learning how to fire a Civil War-era muzzle loading musket (above) and Washington & Lee students taking a class in public history (above) illustrate the spectrum of learning opportunities in the museum environment.

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**Preserving,  
Interpreting,  
Inspiring**

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He also discussed reinforcing one of our most important sculptures Donald DeLue's *Orpheus*.

**Mike Alsop Visit:** Remington Society of America Vice President Mike Alsop visited our museum to see revolvers manufactured by his relative C. W. Alsop. The museum has one on display and two more items in storage, all from the Henry Stewart, VMI 1935 Collection. Our Navy revolver, with serial #57, is the earliest he has documented, and he confirmed that an "Alsop-looking" revolver, is not. An Alsop percussion capper from our collection is also something he has rarely seen.

**Collaborative Visit:** On November 11, staff from Jackson's Headquarters in Winchester toured the **Jackson House Museum** to evaluate our interpretive program and self-guided tour. They are exploring ways to enhance their own programming and operations.

**Former Victoria and Albert Museum** textile curator MS Frances Richardson, an expert on loom work and weaving, met with staff On November 14 to discuss our loom and its future interpretive use at the Virginia Museum of the Civil War.

### Public Programming and Activities...

**Bundle Tickets:** In October, we introduced Bundle Tickets to encourage visitation between the **VMI Museum** and the **Jackson House Museum**. From October through December, over 15% of tickets sold were Bundle Tickets. Starting March 1, the Bundle Ticket program will expand to include all three VMI Museum System sites.

**Apple Day:** The **Jackson House Museum** celebrated the 40th annual Apple Day on Saturday, October 5. This free, family-friendly event took place on Washington Street in front of the museum and featured crafts, games, dancing, and storytelling. Demonstrations using the 19th-century cider press were held in the garden. This year's event drew approximately 900 attendees—an increase of 250 visitors compared to 2023.

**Christmas at the Jacksons':** On Sunday, December 15, the Jackson House Museum hosted its annual "*Christmas at the Jacksons*" event. Visitors enjoyed a candlelit tour of the house, enhanced by first-person interpreters who brought history to life. Despite inclement weather, the event attracted 77 attendees and collected over 164 pounds of food donations for the Rockbridge Area Relief Association Food Pantry.

**American Battlefield Trust videos now live.** Noted Civil War historian/author Sarah Bierle and museum staff Sarah Hebert and Phoebe Cox participated in the creation of a new streaming video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmnbqCT6ePQ>. A



*A proud VMI Museum Cadet Assistant Anna Grace Adams, VMI 2026, places the museum's example of her class ring in the popular ring exhibit.*



### One-hundred and six years earlier...

*Cadet Thomas Slack received his VMI ring, donated by Jane Sigloh in October, 2024. Mr Slack's ring now represents his class in the VMI ring exhibit. 2024.0047*





*The Virginia Speleological Society mapped several caves beneath the New Market battlefield November 2024. These caves can now be monitored and entrances secured.*

companion video specifically about the museum exhibits is underway.

**Spirits of New Market Event, October 12:** This candle-light evening event with a cast of 30 costumed interpreters drew over 200 attendees; \$1804.72 in revenue. Troop 1879 lead by Trey Copenhaver, VMI 2012, volunteered at this event.

**The Numbers...** Attendance and revenue is up over same time last year comparisons:

	Attendance	Revenue (Tickets, Sales, Donations)
<b>VMIM</b>	6%, 11,744	30%, \$141,000
<b>VMCW</b>	10%, 11,336	9%, 150,900
<b>JHM</b>	23%, 6269	24%, \$76,232
<b>TOTALS</b>	29,349	\$368,132

*Winter at the Bushong Farm,  
New Market Battlefield.*



**THE VMI MUSEUM SYSTEM**  
*-The Memory of the Institute-*  
[www.vmi.edu/museums-and-archives](http://www.vmi.edu/museums-and-archives)  
 540.464.7334

*The VMI Museum System is one of 1,099 out of an estimated 33,000 museums in the United States currently professionally accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The system consists of the VMI Museum (founded 1845), the Jackson House Museum (founded 1954) and the Virginia Museum of the Civil War, New Market Battlefield State Historical Park (founded 1964). Currently over 60,000 visitors attend the three museums collectively every year.*