



# On Your MARC

MUSEUM & ARCHIVES OF ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

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## Flat footing competition added to 2018 Pickin' at the MARC

The rhythm of old-time music lured several children to stand up and shuffle their feet during our November mill music program. Little did they know they were carrying on a time-honored tradition, flat footing dance, which the MARC will showcase during our 4th Annual Fiddlers Convention. We are excited to add a new opportunity for dancers to perform and compete during Pickin' at the MARC.

Flat footing is a freestyle dance in which the dancer keeps both feet close to the floor. There are not many standard steps; each person just dances to the rhythm of the song. Steps are made by sliding the feet with a shuffling movement. The dancer's body stays erect but loose, and the arms move only slightly to help with balance. Years ago, when houses had small rooms and limited space for dancing, dancers had to confine their movement to a limited area.

Current interest in flat footing is strong, with participants traveling long distances to attend festivals and conventions. Both dancers and instrumentalists (*including MARC volunteer Ruthie Young, top right photo*) enjoy making life-long friendships within this music community. Old-time music and flat footing traditions are often passed down among families and neighbors. Ruthie has seen children as young as three years old in competitions, and she dreams of a time when MARC might offer a youth program to preserve the art of traditional dance and music.

Performers and spectators should join us at MARC on Saturday, November 10. Registration begins at 11:00 a.m. and continues through the day. Competition begins at noon. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. Competitors receive a \$5 rebate following completion of their competition category. Visitors will also receive a sneak peak at MARC's new agriculture exhibit, tours of the museum and Wright Tavern, and access to food vendors.

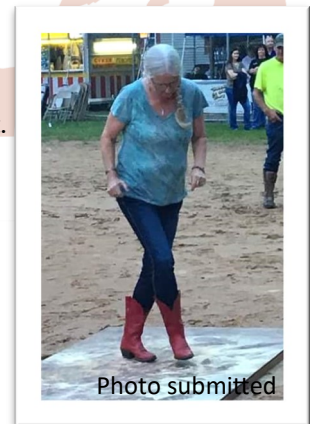


Photo submitted

**EVENT SPONSORS**



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3rd Quarter  
Visitor Count:  
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## *From our Director, Jordan Rossi*



### Soirée supporters help keep MARC going

Friends of the MARC:

October's newsletter is always a special one because in it we have the pleasure of acknowledging the businesses and individuals who make our annual Summer Soirée a success. I hope you'll take some time to read their names and appreciate their contributions.

Our theme, "Going Places," acknowledged the growth of the MARC over the last six years and one of our newest artifacts, a 1916 Model T Ford. We decorated the tables at Deep Springs Country Club with unique repurposed license plate vases, acquired by our wonderful volunteers and bent into shape by Operations Manager Fletcher Waynick, and historic photographs of the everyday people of Rockingham County and their ancestors posing with their automobiles.

It was a night to remember. We marveled at the differences between a 1908 car and a 2018 electric car and posed for photos with them. We played games, enjoyed excellent food, and many of us took home delightful items from the silent and live auctions.

This year we are pleased to report that the Summer Soirée raised nearly \$39,000. This total includes funds to support the day-to-day operations of the MARC as well as our special project, the preservation of the Pete Comer photography collection.

When you see a busload of students pull into our parking lot, receive a flyer about an upcoming MARC event, or hear an update about our collection, you're witnessing the results of the funds we raised at the Summer Soirée.

Soon, we will continue efforts to fund the remainder of our budget by mailing our annual donation



Soirée photos by James Anderson Photography. Top: Karah Fegeley, of Cary, marvels at her victory in the Heads or Tails game. Middle: Beth Gunn draws a lucky winner's number. Bottom: Brenda Ward and Judy Wall pose with the 1908 ABC Touring Car.

letters. If you missed the Soirée or if your resources allow you to give more, we urge you to consider making a year-end gift to the MARC. Museum salaries, supplies, and operations are all funded by the generosity of you, our friends and members. Your gifts ensure the MARC will continue "going places."

## *Volunteers are the key to our success*

### Young goes from gift shop customer to volunteer

As one of our newer volunteers, Ruthiebell (Ruthie) Young laments that she did not get involved at MARC sooner. She got “hooked on MARC” one day when she came searching for a book in the gift shop. Before she left, she asked how she could help! Her lifelong interest in history and genealogy make her a natural around the MARC, whether it is leading school tours or helping with a variety of other tasks. Her current involvement helping to organize and promote the Fiddlers Convention has been invaluable.

Ruthie attended her first Old Time music festival in 1969. On a snowy night in 2012, Ruthie was at The Barn in Eden watching people flat footing. After a little convincing, she gave it a try. Soon she was taking dance lessons and learning to play stringed instruments. In Ruthie’s words, “I walked through the door and never looked back..”

Ruthie and her partner, Randall Cothran, travel far and near to attend bluegrass and fiddlers conventions. In her travels this year, she has distributed bundles of flyers inviting musicians and dancers to attend our event. Her vision is for the MARC Fiddlers Convention to grow so much that it “spills outside the courthouse,” and she is doing her part to make this a reality!



Photo credit: James Anderson

(Left to right): Ruthie Young and Carol Adams wait to be assigned students to guide during an elementary school tour.

### Thanks to special volunteers for making the Soirée spectacular



Photo credit: James Anderson

Event co-chairs: Tilda Balsley and Bill Horsley

Registration and Greeters: Karen Baker, Tilda Balsley, Ann Brady, Jeff Bullins, Robbin Dodson

Car show: Neal Bullins, Jack Holcomb (*photo left with 1908 ABC Touring Car and Jordan Rossi*)

Venue sponsors: Barry and Robbin Dodson

Photography: James Anderson

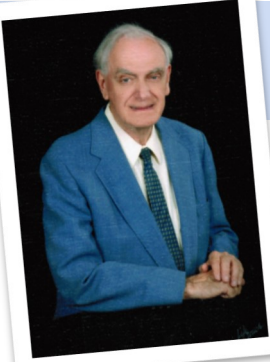
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Table captains: Karen Baker, Skip and Tilda Balsley, Ann Brady, Jeff and Jean Bullins, Ron and Cindy Farris, Brad and Beth Gunn, Bill Horsley, Bill and Brenda Ward

Decorations: Joyce Anderson, James Anderson, Tilda Balsley, Libby Barrett, Mary Barrett, Jean Bullins, Fletcher Dalton, Robbin Dodson, Jane Haines, Becky Norman, Hazel Puckett, Sharon Tongbua, Fletcher Waynick, Ruthie Young, and others



## *Mr. History: Bob Carter, County Historian*

### **High Rock Ford has long history as a mill site**

The long history of milling at High Rock Ford began with Aaron Pinson, who applied for several Granville land grants. On one such grant of 67 acres, Pinson erected a grist mill by December 1753. Pinson's mill was the first known mill in what is now Rockingham County.

In 1754 Joseph Pinson, probably a son of Aaron, was granted 393 acres adjoining the mill tract. This land lay on High Rock Creek. In September 1752 Joseph was granted the right to operate an "Ordinary" (tavern) by the Orange County Court (the High Rock area would later become part of Guilford and finally Rockingham County). No doubt this was the first Tavern to operate in the High Rock area. It appears that Joseph did not renew this Tavern license after 1752.

In 1756 Joseph Pinson sold his property to Hugh Porter and the following year Aaron sold his mill tract to Richard Simpson, a wealthy planter who owned a 612 acre tract of adjoining property. Tradition says Simpson never lived on his sizeable High Rock plantation but he had peach orchards on the property and made brandy, which he hauled to Fayetteville for sale. In 1770, Richard Simpson sold his High Rock mill to his son-in-law Zachens Tate. It is not clear how long Tate owned the former Pinson-Simpson mill.

It is likely Simpson's mill was used to grind cornmeal for Governor Tryon's North Carolina militia troops in 1771 after the Battle of Alamance on the 16th of May. With a large militia to feed, Governor Tryon made requisitions from the settlements in the Piedmont to feed the Troops. He requested the area from Haw Fields (Alamance County) to Simpson's Mill to furnish twenty steers and ten barrels of unsifted cornmeal to feed the army.

Ten years later, High Rock Mill likely ground cornmeal to feed the troops of General Nathanael Greene during the Revolutionary War. General Greene's troops were bivouacked at High Rock from 28 February to 12 March 1781. A number of companies of troops from Virginia and other areas of North Carolina joined the American Army at High Rock during the period.

During the 1780s the old Pinson-Simpson mill changed ownership again and washed away or burned. By 1787 Benjamin Spencer purchased the mill site, to be run in partnership with his relatives John and Thomas Spencer. Benjamin applied to the Rockingham County Court for permission to rebuild a mill at High Rock Ford. By 1794, the Spencer partners had rebuilt a grist mill with an oil mill and a distillery. The family also operated a store on the property during this time-span. The Spencers gave a Deed of Trust on the mill property in 1794 for the sum of £1,500. When they were unable to repay the debt, the mill changed hands again, and was later purchased by Peter Bysor in 1805.

Bysor's mill manufactured flour of the first quality to be sold in Petersburg, Virginia and Fayetteville, NC. It seems likely that Bysor constructed the massive rock dam at High Rock during his ownership of the property.

In 1811 Peter Bysor sold the 600 acre High Rock mill tract to Nathanael Scales for the sum of \$8,000. Scales' daughter Mary and her husband Joseph McCain later became the owners of High Rock Mill, but that's another story.

## MARC Business

### Comer fund-a-need drive nears goal

Pete Comer was a prolific photographer from Madison, serving Rockingham and Stokes counties and beyond. He photographed weddings, reunions, graduations, municipal events, and local businesses for over fifty years. Additionally, people brought him historic photographs to restore.

Before Pete passed away in 2015, he had donated much of his work to the MARC — prints and tens of thousands of negatives. When we begin to go through them piece by piece, there's no telling what bits of "new" history we might find. Fortunately, Pete and his wife, Jackie, kept their work well organized, making this collection a *phenomenal* resource for genealogy research.

Unfortunately, to search the collection now, it is necessary to manually search through drawers of index cards. To streamline the search, the MARC will digitize an index, so researchers will only need a last name, a date, or a keyword for the search.

The most pressing need in our archives is preserving and organizing the Pete Comer Collection. At the Summer Soirée, we raised \$12,000 of

our \$15,000 fund-a-need goal. However, before we begin the work we must raise the remaining \$3,000, to ensure we can complete the project.

Preservation of this collection is a monumental task, one we take very seriously. Currently, the collection is housed in acidic cardboard boxes and envelopes, which threaten the longevity of the collection over time. Funds raised for this collection will be used to purchase new archival grade housing for the collection. Due to its sheer size, I estimate it will cost \$5,000 to \$7,000 for these supplies.

All this brings us to the final expense related to the Comer Collection. Rehousing and reorganizing the collection and creating the searchable index will require hours and hours of labor. The MARC plans to hire a qualified intern or consultant to lead volunteers through the process, which will allow the project to occur on a much faster timeline than the MARC's current staff of three could manage. (If this sounds like a project for which you would like to assist, please let us know!)

If you have already donated to the Comer Collection, we thank you. If you have not, we hope you will contribute to make this important work possible. We're almost there!

By Jordan Rossi



Photo credit: James Anderson

Above: Pete Comer's daughter, Carolyn Comer Price, and husband, Curtis, at the Soirée. Right: Comer's award winning image of Preacher Ollie Tatum. Below: A portion of the Comer Collection in the MARC vault.



Photo credit: J. Bullfins

## Coming Events

### November Genealogy Roundtable: Oral Histories



Led by Valencia Abbott and  
Mark Sattler

During her preparation for June's Roundtable, Rockingham County Early College High School social studies teacher Valencia Abbott realized she needed more time to address the important role of oral narratives for tracing the family tree, particularly in African American families for whom written documentation is limited. At 12:00 noon on Saturday, November 17, Valencia will join historian Mark Sattler to lead the November Genealogy Roundtable: Oral Histories. Participants are invited to bring a bagged lunch.

Valencia's goal is to help participants understand the historical significance of oral histories. She will be sharing reasons why it is essential that we start having these conversations with family, friends, and neighbors, and tips on ways to get the desired information from the interview process.

For eight years, while working as an RCC instructor, Mark guided his students to conduct more than 700 oral histories of civic leaders, veterans, farmers, and citizens from across Rockingham County and beyond. In the last two years, Mark has been digitizing the collection to make it publicly accessible. He hopes MARC's program will increase awareness of this collection and help identify new volunteers for the project, in addition to sharing different approaches to the collection of oral histories.



### Featured bands selected for Pickin' at the MARC

**Sons of the South** (*top photo*), a traditional bluegrass band, has been in existence for over 50 years. The group is described as polished and professional, a crowd favorite, and noted for performing traditional and original material.

Siblings Martha and Kilby Spencer, from Whitetop Mountain, are joined by Kelley Breiding in the group known as **Spencer Branch** (*bottom photo*). Their repertoire draws upon their mountain heritage, in addition to traditional country, bluegrass, and original songs. Their vocal harmonies and exciting fiddle tunes are a powerful combination.

## Recent Events

### July Programs



Photo credit: J. Bullins



Photo credit: Lane Haines

(Left photo L to R) Taylor Rorrer, Wayne Seymour, and Fred Reynolds entertained and informed guests at "Music in the Mills" July 19.

(Right photo) Peggy Burton presented ways to share family history at July's Genealogy Roundtable: Christmas in July.

### Second annual seminar focuses on Madison's Freetown section

By Fletcher Dalton

Burton Street, which runs between the Food Lion shopping center in Mayodan and the new Madison-Mayodan Public Library, was once known as Straight Street and was part of the area referred to as Freetown. On Saturday, August 18, Fletcher Dalton and Valencia Abbott coordinated the second annual Remembering Freetown seminar. Those who attended came to share and gather facts about the community. (Photo right).



Photo credit: Jordan Rossi

Freetown began as the home of former enslaved and free people of African descent who left plantations during the reconstruction era. Between 1940 and the 1960s, Freetown, though neither incorporated nor named on local maps, was well known for its African-American businesses, schools, shops, and social clubs.

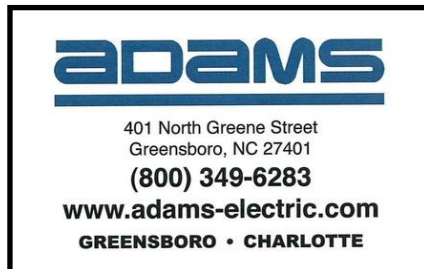
During the seminar, guests and local historians swapped information. One person sent a video to share stories of her family and their schooling and work in Madison during the era of strictly enforced segregation. Another participant provided a narrative of Freetown, including how the two bedroom houses came to be built. He provided names of persons (now deceased) who occupied the homes. He also recalled the annual celebrations of Mothers' Day at a nearby church and the crowds who came from miles away to participate in the festivities.

Participants were delighted to learn that the original street sign for Straight Street was located and displayed during the event. It has been entrusted to Fletcher Dalton, who leads the ongoing research about the area. We are hopeful that new information and artifacts will turn up before next year's seminar.

# Summer Soirée 2018

Thanks to local industries, businesses and friends  
for supporting MARC and the Summer Soirée

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MARC volunteer Kim Everhart coordinates the live auction displays.

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## Summer Soirée 2018

*The Summer Soirée live and silent auctions provide gala guests with enticing gifts and enlivening competition, while also providing critical financial support for MARC. Please join us in thanking these businesses and friends for their generous donations to the silent auction.*

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**ON YOUR MARC Staff**

Editor & Design: Jean Bullins  
Editorial Team & Photography:

James Anderson	Jane Haines
Tilda Balsley	Jordan Rossi
Libby Barrett	Sharon Tongbua
Bob Carter	



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**MARC your calendar**

**OCTOBER**

*NOTE: High Rock Ford Park Ribbon Cutting postponed due to recent hurricane flooding.*

**NOVEMBER**

**Saturday, November 10**  
**4th Annual Pickin' at the MARC Fiddlers Convention**

Registration opens at 11:00 a.m.  
Competition begins at 12:00 noon

**Saturday, November 17**  
**Genealogy Roundtable: Oral Histories**

Led by Mark Sattler and Valencia Abbott. Learn how to interview and preserve precious stories of others' life experiences.

**DECEMBER**

**Saturday, December 8**  
**Wright Tavern Christmas Open House 2:00-4:00 pm**

Refreshments and social event. This year's decoration theme will be 1905 - a time of change in Wentworth, North Carolina, and in the nation.

Source:<http://gb.fotolibra.com/images/previews/75908-children-dancing-round-christmas-tree-circa-1905.jpeg>



**MARC Hours of Operation**

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday	1 pm - 6 pm
Saturday	10 am - 4 pm

**Museum Admission**

Adult	\$5.00
Seniors & Students	\$3.50
Children	\$2.50
Children under 4 years	FREE
Family pass	\$15.00
Members	FREE

**Visit [www.themarconline.org](http://www.themarconline.org) for individual and business membership information and forms.**

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