History Day on March 5, 2009, was a success in terms of the number of historical, genealogical and preservation organizations with display tables, number of visitors to those tables, and 43 new History Heroes honored. Good weather certainly played a role in the excellent turnout, but we hope all participants who appreciated each other’s accomplishments and shared camaraderie will move forward with a buoyed sense of common purpose to preserve and promote the history and culture of West Virginia and her people. Mark your 2010 calendars for the 14th annual West Virginia History Day at the Legislature on Thursday, February 18!

Virginia Legislative Petitions for West Virginia Counties

In conjunction with the Mining Your History Foundation, the West Virginia Archives and History Library has acquired Virginia Legislative Petitions on microfilm from the Library of Virginia for the counties which formed West Virginia, except Monongalia County. We expect to acquire the petitions for Monongalia County, as well as those for “parent” counties of Augusta, Giles, Montgomery and Tazewell. Beginning in 1774, Virginia citizens petitioned the legislature for private, public and political concerns that could not be addressed by or were not properly tended by local authorities. The petitioner did not have to be a voter—women, slaves and free blacks could not vote, but they could petition. Since few people could attend legislative sessions in Richmond and since transportation and communication were both slow and difficult, legislators made themselves available, usually at their county courthouses, to hear from constituents before proceeding to the General Assembly. People could present their concerns orally to individual legislators, or in the form of written petitions addressed to the whole General Assembly.

Petition research is not for the beginning family history researcher, but is an additional resource for the researcher who has looked at everything else available. Petitions are the only place divorce records will be found for this time period, since divorce was only obtainable then by petitioning the legislature. One may find a petition relevant to a specific family line, or may flesh out an understanding of an ancestor’s geographic area and of the practical and political circumstances of the

Refurbishing of Archives Library Reading Room Continues

Refurbishing of the Archives and History Library Reading Room continues, with larger projects anticipated over the next few months. The library chairs have been reupholstered and well-padded, and a new Security/Copy desk setup has been installed. Plans call for the carpet to be replaced and the room to be painted. The window blinds, original to the opening of The Cultural Center, will be replaced with ultraviolet light-filtering blinds, and the motorized system to open and close the blinds will be either replaced or repaired. We do not know at the time of publication if these projects will necessitate any closings of the Reading Room to the public. Keep an eye on our Web site at http://www.wvculture.org/history and your local media for announcements. Particularly if you are making a special trip or traveling a distance to visit us, we urge you to call us before coming to ensure that the Library will be open to serve you that day.

Continued on the next page
time and place a family lived in. Former slaves or free blacks sought permission to remain in the commonwealth to stay near enslaved spouses and children (free blacks were only allowed to stay in Virginia for a limited amount of time).

Searching the petitions effectively for genealogical information takes patience and a certain amount of fore-knowledge of where people should be and what they may have been doing so that the researcher knows what to watch for when browsing through the petitions. All petitions from the county in which an ancestor lived are potential sources of information and should be browsed. For instance, a petition for a new road or road improvements may give reasons for the request, such as needing access to a mill and naming the mill’s owner. In addition to the information found in petitions, the records themselves are originals, not transcriptions; therefore, the signatures are those of the actual petitioners, not written by clerks.

Petition research has great potential for historians as well. Local historians may discover when and why a road was built or diverted, identify types of local businesses and names of owners, find names of professionals such as doctors and lawyers, explore disputes over county borders and naming of county seats, and much more. Even a petition for a change or waiver of a tax can provide a window into the circumstances that prompted the request.

A description of these records can be found in The Library of Virginia’s Legislative Petitions, Research Notes Number 18, posted at http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whatwehave/gov/rn18_legspet.htm. The West Virginia Archives and History Library has the most relevant of the additional sources mentioned in the Research Notes bibliography, including Popular Influence Upon Public Policy: Petitioning in Eighteenth-Century Virginia, by Raymond C. Bailey, and all five periodical articles cited. Three Web sites with searchable databases for locating Virginia petitions are identified:

- [www.lva.virginia.gov/whatwehave/gov/petitions/](http://www.lva.virginia.gov/whatwehave/gov/petitions/): Calendar of Legislative Petitions submitted to the Virginia General Assembly from 1776–1865. Information includes the name of the petitioner and town/county; date presented and description of petition; and reel, box and folder numbers. Each petition has been assigned one or more topics that allow subject index searches.

- [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/petitions](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/petitions): In the Religion section of the Library of Congress’s American Memory Web pages, 423 early religious petitions to the Virginia General Assembly from 1774–1802 can be searched.

- [http://library.uncg.edu/slavery_petitions/](http://library.uncg.edu/slavery_petitions/): The University of North Carolina at Greensboro maintains a searchable database of petitions regarding slavery from Virginia and half a dozen other southern states. (Of course, the Archives Library will only have the petitions for Virginia.)

Petitions are not indexed by the name of the petitioner, as a rule, but by the “nature of the petitions.” The names of individuals are sometimes listed in the “Description” section of the index entries, but not always.

Researchers need to focus on the geographic area and time period, then look through petitions of that period. A description of these records can be found in The Library of Virginia’s Legislative Petitions, Research Notes Number 18, posted at http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whatwehave/gov/rn18_legspet.htm. The West Virginia Archives and History Library has the most relevant of the additional sources mentioned in the Research Notes bibliography, including Popular Influence Upon Public Policy: Petitioning in Eighteenth-Century Virginia, by Raymond C. Bailey, and all five periodical articles cited. Three Web sites with searchable databases for locating Virginia petitions are identified:

- [www.lva.virginia.gov/whatwehave/gov/petitions/](http://www.lva.virginia.gov/whatwehave/gov/petitions/): Calendar of Legislative Petitions submitted to the Virginia General Assembly from 1776–1865. Information includes the name of the petitioner and town/county; date presented and description of petition; and reel, box and folder numbers. Each petition has been assigned one or more topics that allow subject index searches.

- [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/petitions](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/petitions): In the Religion section of the Library of Congress’s American Memory Web pages, 423 early religious petitions to the Virginia General Assembly from 1774–1802 can be searched.

- [http://library.uncg.edu/slavery_petitions/](http://library.uncg.edu/slavery_petitions/): The University of North Carolina at Greensboro maintains a searchable database of petitions regarding slavery from Virginia and half a dozen other southern states. (Of course, the Archives Library will only have the petitions for Virginia.)

Petitions are not indexed by the name of the petitioner, as a rule, but by the “nature of the petitions.” The names of individuals are sometimes listed in the “Description” section of the index entries, but not always.

Researchers need to focus on the geographic area and time period, then look through petitions of that period.

**Pioneer Press**

**Editorials Online**

Selected editorials by J. R. Clifford from Pioneer Press, West Virginia’s first black newspaper, have been posted online at [http://www.wvculture.org/history/africanamericans/pioneerpress.html](http://www.wvculture.org/history/africanamericans/pioneerpress.html). The posted editorials date from January 1911 through September 1916. Clifford was a trailblazer in many aspects of West Virginia’s black history. He broke new ground in education, journalism, law and civil rights. In 1887 he was the first African American to pass the West Virginia bar examination. One of two landmark cases he argued before the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals resulted in the first ruling in U.S. history to determine that racial discrimination was illegal. For more information about Clifford and his editorials, visit [http://www.wvculture.org/news.aspx?Agency=Division&Id=1045](http://www.wvculture.org/news.aspx?Agency=Division&Id=1045).
Gravestone Preservation Workshop in Fairmont

Woodlawn Cemetery will be hosting a one-day, hands-on workshop in gravestone preservation. On Saturday, May 2, 2009, Jonathan Appell will be showing how to repair old gravestones, slow or reverse weather-related deterioration, and stabilize stones which have begun to lose their integrity. Woodlawn is located in one of the older neighborhoods in Fairmont, West Virginia. Men and women significant to the history of the state and the nation are buried there, including Francis Harrison Pierpont, considered the father of West Virginia; Aretus Brooks Fleming, 8th governor; Matthew Mansfield Neely, 21st governor; Congressman and Senator; the first three state superintendents of schools; over 100 Civil War veterans, both Union and Confederate; as well as judges, lawyers, merchants and just plain folks.

The 42-acre cemetery is 186 years old, has over 15,000 graves, and is still an active burying ground. Gravestones can be found in a variety of conditions, including listing, sinking and disrepair. Appell will use an area of African American gravestones in very poor condition in order to demonstrate various techniques and products to help restore and maintain the stones. Cost for the workshop is $50.00, including lunch. If you are interested in attending the workshop, please respond to Gena Wagaman, Superintendent, by April 15, 2009, at (304) 657-1813, or e-mail gwagaman@verizon.net. Information for this article was obtained from a February 9 press release from the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike Alliance, http://www.sptturnpike.org.

Editor’s Note: Check “Cemeteries” in the Subject Index of West Virginia Archives and History News at http://www.wvculture.org/history/ahnews/ahnews.html to learn more about cemetery and grave marker preservation. Visit the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office Website at http://www.wvculture.org/shpo/cemeteries.html for more articles, as well as information and forms for the West Virginia Cemetery Survey.

Vital Research Records Update

Since the last batch of county and state records were added to West Virginia Vital Research Records (VRR), the server for the database is running at near capacity during the busiest times of each day. At best, the system is sluggish, and at worst has timed out before producing results pages. Users have complained that images sometimes will not open, or that they can not move from one page of results to the next. Archives and History is aware of these problems, has addressed them by defining both the issues and a solution, and is awaiting a decision on a new server. In the meantime, users who encounter difficulties are asked to try again at a different time of day, particularly early morning, when fewer researchers are online.

The remaining counties to be added to VRR are Barbour, Berkeley, Boone, Brooke, Doddridge, Fayette, Hancock, Kanawha, Marion, Mason, Mercer, Ohio and Tyler.

Newspaper Microfilm in the Archives Library

If you have not visited the Microfilm Storage Room of the Archives and History Library recently you will find a few changes. More cabinets have been added to accommodate the ever growing collection. As a result, the microfilm boxes have been resorted, and many will be in different locations than you found them in your last visit. The "Miscellaneous" newspaper section, consisting of mixed newspaper titles, is now located in the “M” section of the county newspaper drawers. The Fayette Tribune is now alphabetized by “O” for “Oak Hill,” keeping with the practice of filing the daily papers by the town of origin. Newspapers on microfilm in the Archives Library collection are listed by county on our Web site at http://www.wvculture.org/history/newspapers/newsmic.html.

Continued on page 5
Here are several samples of petitions:

- John Norris, Lewis County, 1824: surgeon in the 125th Regiment of Virginia Militia asks for an act allowing him pay for his services for the last five years.
- John Conrad Holstein, Preston County, 1831: asks for a divorce from his wife Wilhelmina.
- John Carter, Kanawha County, 1806: asks to receive a pension for his services against the Indians in 1792 under John Morris, Captain of the Militia of Kanawha County. Includes certificate.
- Sarah Cunningham, Harrison County, 1816: asks for a small pension for assisting in repelling Indians from the West Fork of the Monogalia River.
- Richard Pointer, Greenbrier County, 1819: former slave of Andrew Donnally asks for relief for him for his services against the Indians during the Revolutionary War in 1778.
- Citizens of Jackson County, 1841: ask for a free and sufficient system of public schools; a yearly and moderate appropriation for the Charleston and Parkersburg Turnpike Road and a branch to the Staunton Road; the abolition of prison for debt; etc.
- Citizens of Williamsport, Taylor County, 1845: ask for a change in the name of the town to Pruntytown.
- Martin Whitzel and others, Ohio County, 1803: ask for some provision for the loss of their father and uncle who were killed by the Indians in defense of the frontier in 1786 and 1788.

Permission to reprint articles from *West Virginia Archives and History News* is granted, provided:

1. The reprint is not used for commercial purposes, and
2. the following notice appears at the end of the reprinted material: Previously published in *West Virginia Archives and History News*, [Volume and issue numbers], [Month, Year], a publication of the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.

**Calendar of Events**

Please check our web site (http://www.wvculture.org/history) for genealogical and historical society meeting announcements, and for more complete information on activities listed below.

**LIBRARY DAY AT THE LEGISLATURE,** March 3:
The West Virginia State Capitol and the Cultural Center, Charleston.

**HISTORY DAY AT THE LEGISLATURE,** March 5:
The West Virginia State Capitol and the Cultural Center, Charleston.

**GENEALOGY FAIR, KANAWHA VALLEY HISTORY CENTER,** April 4: Rand. For more information call (304) 542-3817 or (304) 925-2438, or e-mail kvhe06@yahoo.com.
### Calendar of Events

Please check our web site ([http://www.wvculture.org/history](http://www.wvculture.org/history)) for genealogical and historical society meeting announcements, and for more complete information on activities listed below.

**HOOT OWL NIGHT, April 24–25:** Sponsored by Mining Your History Foundation and West Virginia Archives and History, Archives and History Library, The Cultural Center, Charleston.

**GRAVESTONE PRESERVATION WORKSHOP, May 2:** Woodlawn Cemetery, Fairmont.

**FESTIVAL OF NATIONS CELEBRATING WEIRTON’S 100TH ANNIVERSARY, May 16:** Weirton Millsop Community Center, Weirton. Sponsored by the Weirton Area Museum and Cultural Center. For more information, call Pamela Makricosta, (304) 748-1549.

**VANDALIA GATHERING, May 22–24:** The Capitol Complex and the Cultural Center, Charleston.

**MEMORIAL DAY, May 25:** Archives Library will be closed.

**WEST VIRGINIA ARCHIVES AND HISTORY COMMISSION MEETING, May 29:** Morgantown.

**“SEX IN THE CIVIL WAR,” June 19:** Dr. Thomas Lowry, lecturer, Beverly Heritage Center, Beverly.

**WEST VIRGINIA DAY HOLIDAY, June 19:** Archives Library will be open*.

**WEST VIRGINIA DAY, June 20:** Archives Library will be open*.

**WEST VIRGINIA STATE MUSEUM RE-OPENING, June 20:** The Cultural Center, Charleston.

**LEMUEL CHENOWETH WEEKEND, June 20–21:** Beverly. For more information, visit [http://www.historicbeverly.org](http://www.historicbeverly.org).

**“LISTENING FOR A CHANGE: ORAL HISTORY AND APPALACHIAN HERITAGE,” June 28–July 3:** Folklife documentation course with Michael and Carrie Kline, instructors, Elkins. For more information, visit [http://www.folktalk.org/events.html](http://www.folktalk.org/events.html) or call (304) 636-5444.

**NEW DEAL FESTIVAL, July 10–12:** Arthurdale Heritage, Inc., Arthurdale. For more information, visit [http://www.arthurdaleheritage.org](http://www.arthurdaleheritage.org) or call (304) 864-3959.

**BATTLE OF RICH MOUNTAIN RE-ENACTMENT, July 11–12:** For more information, visit [http://www.richmountain.org](http://www.richmountain.org).

**HISTORY DAY AT THE LEGISLATURE, February 18, 2010:** The West Virginia State Capitol and the Cultural Center, Charleston.

*Only the Archives Library will be staffed—all other Archives offices will be closed.*

The West Virginia Library Commission Library in the Cultural Center is closed weekends and all holidays.
We would love to hear from you.
Let us know what you find helpful in the newsletter, and what new topics you would like covered.
Contact West Virginia Archives and History News Editor
Susan Scouras, (304) 558-0230, Ext. 742, or by e-mail: susan.scouras@wvculture.org.

Archives and History Staff

Joe Geiger .......................................................... Director
Debra Basham .................................................. Archivist (photographs, special collections)
Constance Baston ............................................ Researcher (Veterans Memorial Archives)
Greg Carroll .................................................... Historian (Civil War, Native American history)
Dick Fauss ...................................................... Archivist (microfilm and moving images collection)
Denise Ferguson .............................................. County Records Archivist
Allen Fowler .................................................... Special projects
Elaine Gates .................................................... Library Assistant (microfilming and microfilm repairs)
Ed Hicks ............................................................ Photo Archivist (archival photography, darkroom)
Mary Johnson .................................................... Historian
Terry Lowry .................................................... Library Assistant (Veterans records)
Cathy Miller .................................................... Library Assistant (WV State documents)
Harold Newman ............................................ Library Assistant (microfilming, Revolutionary War)
Susan Scouras ................................................ Librarian (cataloging, Kentucky, library collection, newsletter editor)
Jaime Simmons .............................................. Library Assistant (records of the 1700's and early 1800's, Pennsylvania)
Bobby Taylor .................................................. Library manager
Nancy Waggoner ............................................. Secretary
Bryan Ward ...................................................... Acting Assistant Director
Interns .......................................................... Kyle Campbell, Brett Steele
Part time ......................................................... Matt McGrew
Volunteers .................................................... Carolyn Conner, Bill Kelley, James Wilburn, Sue Shank, Charlotte Thurston, and Ken Bailey

This newsletter is a publication of: The West Virginia Division of Culture and History
Randall Reid-Smith, Commissioner