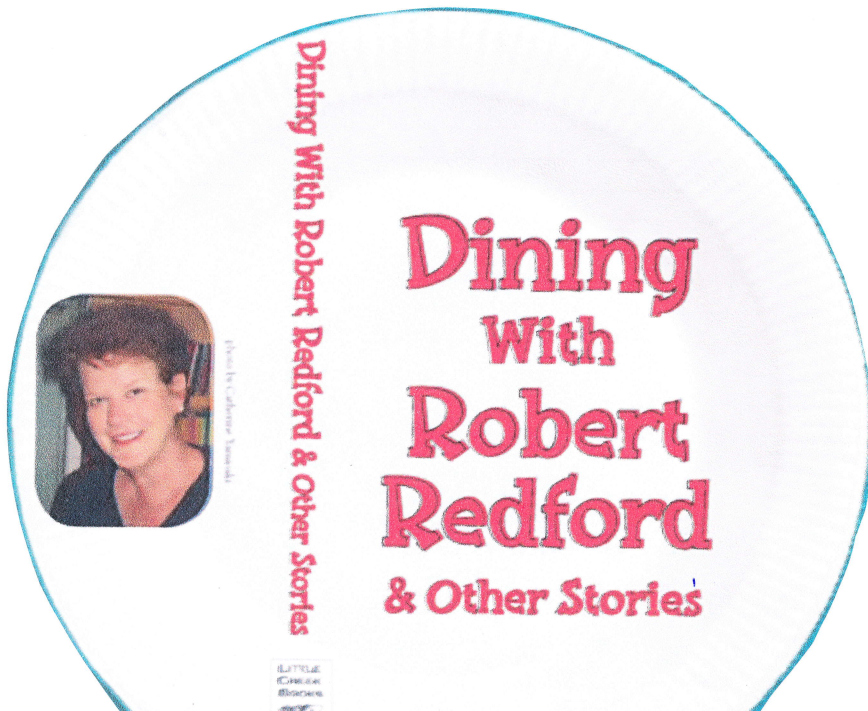


Richmond County Historical Society

'Those who don't remember their ancestors don't deserve to be remembered!'

May 2018 Newsletter



Promotional piece



Tamra Wilson

What makes a Southern story Southern?

Southern stories are more than tangled tales of honeysuckle and kudzu, says writer Tamra Wilson.

The 13 states that comprise the Old South have collectively produced some of the nation's finest writers and the past century's most honored books, she says.

While some insist that "authentic" Southern stories must include a dead mule, Tamra Wilson begs to differ.

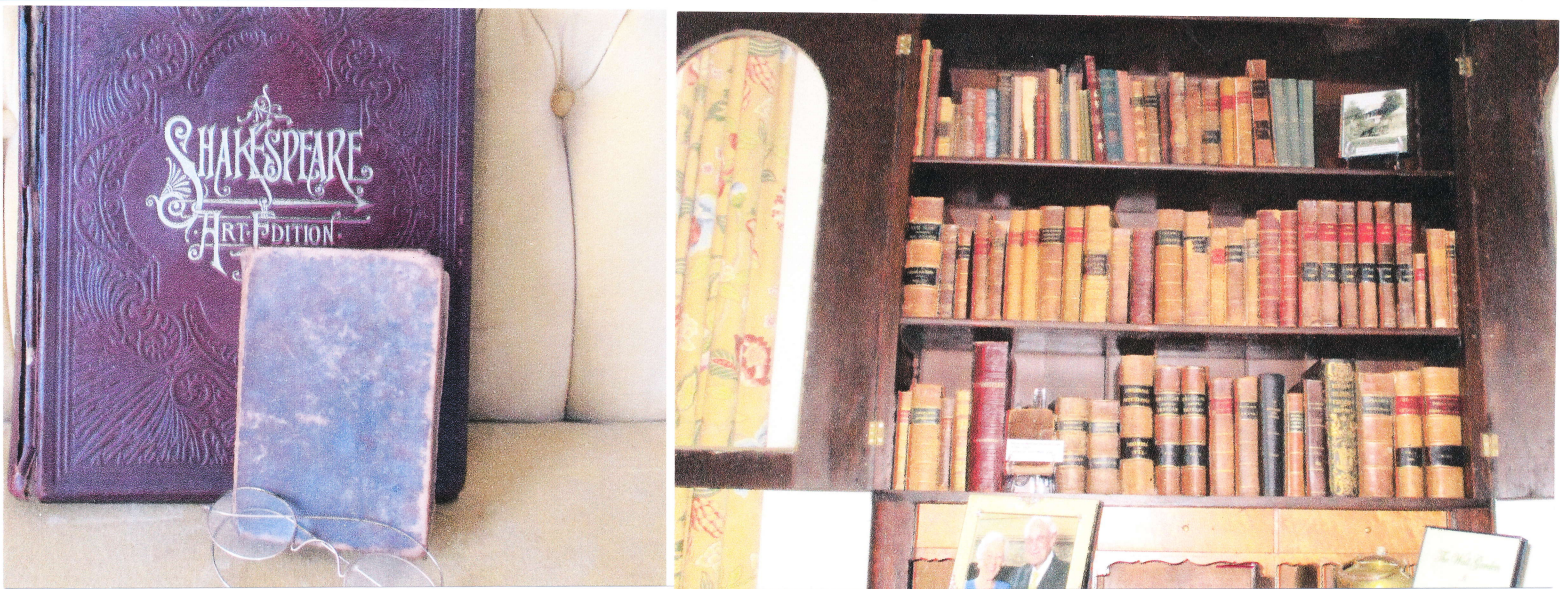
She will make her case on Monday, May 21, at 7 p. m. before the Richmond County Historical Society at Rockingham City Hall.

In her presentation she will share from her own research the six essentials that define Southern fiction and memoir. You'll never look at Southern literature quite the same way again.

Tamra is the author of "Dining with Robert Redford" and other stories, short fiction about small-town life. She has spent most of her career writing and editing for public and private organizations.

For the past 12 years, she has penned a regular column for local newspapers. She is a Road Scholar for the North Carolina Humanities Council.

Her creative work often explores themes of family conflict, belonging and obsession with celebrity. She is a graduate of the University of the Missouri School of Journalism and earned an MFA in creative writing from the University of Southern Maine.



At left is a book of William Pickett Leak's 1800 volume of 5 of Shakespeare's works compared to an 1889 full volume of his works. At right is the secretary in the living room at the Leak-Wall House with a family library.

Reading in the 19th century

An inventory of books in the living room at the Leak-Wall House, some 95, shows they were obtained all before 1908, which is significant because there was no electricity in Rockingham and the house until then – and limited.

Reading was by sunlight or by candlelight, oil or gas lamps - dim lights for sure.

Not only such lighting conditions existed, the size of the print in many of the books would require a magnifying glass. Eyeglasses from the era in the house didn't provide magnifying as good as reading glasses found today in drugstores.

Nevertheless, the residents had plenty of books to read – thick and wordy.

Walter Leak, John Wall Leak's brother, and a founder of local cotton mills in Rockingham, once claimed to have 700 books in his library. None are known to be in the house. He never lived there.

The oldest book is “Lectures on Female Education,” 1794, owned by Eliza Ann Leak, daughter of William Pickett Leak, John Wall Leak's sister, The second oldest book is a very small edition of five of Shakespeare's works, 1800, of William Pickett Leak's.

Most of the books in the collection are for “Annie” Leak Wall (1875-1953), daughter of Clay and Fannie Wall, some 40. However, she had access to all other 55 books and perhaps more than survived at the House.

While men's books were mostly political, historical or science-related, surprisingly some of the women's books also included chemistry, elements of matter and geometry from their college years.

Although the Leaks and Walls mainly lived in Rockingham, they had access to the rest of North Carolina, America and civilization around the world through books.

The Leaks and Wall may have been one of the wealthiest families in Richmond County in their day from farming and textile mills. They also had the opportunity through their privileged access to books to be some of the most educated.