

Richmond County Historical Society

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

November, 2018 Newsletter

Happy Thanksgiving and a Merry Christmas!!!

The Historical Society will not meet again until the January 21, 2019 annual business meeting and election of officers. However, keep in mind the Christmas Social on Dec. 2nd. at the Leak-Wall house beginning at 3 p.m. and ending at 5 p.m. Refreshments will be served. You are encouraged to see the additions to the historical significance of the house as you renew acquaintances with fellow Historical Society members.

Coffins once displayed on Washington Street

Imagine riding west on Washington Street in Rockingham where Liberty Place is today and seeing coffins in several styles being displayed in a glass window.

They were displayed there in the 1830s and 1860s.

The most expensive ones were elaborately hand-carved with intricate floral designs, a specialty so said the late Joe McLaurin, a local historian.

The coffin maker in this case was William D. Ussery.

In 1891, the *Rocket* newspaper in Rockingham advertised that merchant H. C. Watson, among his other dry goods, had just added a "full line of coffins and caskets and is arranging to get a hearse" and that "he will supply the hearse free of charge to those buying a coffin from him."



Horse-Drawn Hearse of M. L. Hinson

Ussery in the 1850s had his coffin shop on the bottom floor of his house on Washington Street. The family lived above the shop. He "made about all the coffins for the section from \$2 up," according to the July 2, 1953 *Rockingham Post-Dispatch*.

Ussery's occupation was "mechanic" and "coffin maker." He worked on mechanical devices such as buggies, wagons, waterwheels and grist mills. He

was also a blacksmith, carpenter, cabinet maker and builder of coffins.

McLaurin said Ussery's coffins were considered among the finest in the entire area.

In 1854, Ussery charged from \$3 to \$8.50 for a coffin, and \$1 to dig a grave and carry a corpse to it.

In 1868, prominent local farmer Mial Wall's family paid \$16 for his coffin.

That same year, Col. Henry William Harrington's family paid \$20 for his.

Those fine coffins are all gone. If one exists, the Richmond County Historical Society would like to see it. They were buried before metal caskets and strong vaults were used to surround them.

In 1960, the tombstones of people buried in Old Town Cemetery (also known as Rockingham Graveyard or Terry Graveyard) were moved from the

present site of Station One, Rockingham Fire Department, on South Lawrence Street to a special section of Eastside Cemetery. Some caskets were moved. For example, the caskets of John Shortridge and his wife buried in the 1880s were moved to Mary Love Cemetery in Hamlet.

But for some, there was nothing to move except the tombstones, for those who had them. "Dust to dust" was fulfilled with the very early burials when the coffins and bodies blended in with the soil. Their elements remain.

Cadaver dogs were recently used in Rockingham to locate old burial sites. The dog handler said roots of trees near the grave absorb minerals-that are associated with human remains-by osmosis into the trees that the dogs can detect.

Looking For That Perfect, Inexpensive Christmas Gift?

Your Historical Society has four books to suggest as Christmas Gifts

No Ordinary Lives; Richmond County From 1750 to 1900----- \$10.

Mixed Blessings; Richmond County from 1900 to 2000-----\$10.

The Architectural History of Richmond County-----\$10.

Camp Mackall, North Carolina. Its origin and Times In The Sandhills--\$30.

Mail your order to: Richmond County Historical Society, P. O. Box 1763, Rockingham, N. C. 28380

Yes!! Please send the following:

 No Ordinary Lives @ \$10. *Mixed Blessings @\$10* *Architectural History @ \$10.* *Camp Mackall@ \$30.*

Please add \$5. 00 per book for mailing costs.

Name: _____

Address _____

You can also come to 108 N. Hancock St., Rockingham weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and Noon and save mailing costs. They can also be bought at Christmas On The Square this Dec. 1st.