



The Link



preserving our heritage and building a future together

Volume 16, Number 3

Summer 2017

Legs In a Barrel Captures the Audience

The interactive murder mystery, *Legs In a Barrel* was presented to sold out crowds at the Historic Eureka Inn on August 25 and 26.

The play is based on an actual series of events from 1909. The following account comes from an article from the Newport, TN, newspaper the *Plain Talk* from September 2, 1909. The tale started when the body of wealthy Jonesborough businessman, A. J. Slagle, was recovered from the French Broad River near Bridgeport. He was an obvious victim of foul play, having been beaten and stabbed. It was

determined he had \$4000 on him when he left Jonesborough for Newport to complete a business deal with a former employee, John Spencer. The money was missing from his body.

While Spencer immediately was considered a prime suspect, Newport authorities allowed him to travel to Jonesborough to attend Mr. Slagle's funeral.

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Cast of Legs In a Barrel: Anne G'Fellers-Mason, Kyle Mason, Joel VanEaton, Katelyn Yarbrough and Dana Kehs



Death mask of Beckie Bean

Bean Deathmask Unveiled at History Happy Hour

The July History Happy Hour included the unveiling of a new artifact in the HA collection - the death mask of newborn Beckie Bean, daughter of Hester and James Baxter Bean. She was born and died in Washington County in 1870. It is believed that mother Hester had the mask cast so that her husband, away in France on a mountaineering expedition, would be able to see the face of his lost child. Unfortunately, Mr. Bean never returned from France, having been lost in a blizzard on the summit of a French mountain.

Hester and her son Chapin died within a few years of Beckie and James Bean. Hester and Chapin Bean are buried in the Salem Cemetery near Washington College. It is believed Beckie is likely buried there as well in an unmarked grave.

The death mask was donated to the Heritage Alliance this year from the Bovell family.

An article on the life of James Baxter Bean can be found on Page 3.



"A Spot on the Hill" Readies Fall Performances



Actors in A Spot on the Hill from 2016

A Spot on the Hill, a dramatic play held every October in the Old Jonesborough Cemetery, has scheduled its fall programs. They will be held at 6:30 p.m. on October 20, 21, and 27, with a 2:00 p.m. performance on October 28.

The show will feature new characters, including a representative from the cemetery section designated in 1849 for "the burial of colored persons and strangers." Come see us explore the lives of Jonesborough's past.

History Happy Hour Announces Fall Programs

The Heritage Alliance's monthly program, "History Happy Hour" continues to draw in good crowds and interesting programs. 162 attendees have participated so far in 2017. The September and October programs will be held at the International Storytelling Center, while November's program will be at the Chester Inn State Historic Site and Museum. Programs start at 6:30 pm. Here is the fall schedule for History Happy Hour:

- September 21: Amy Steadman, collections manager at the Reece Museum at ETSU and graduate student Mary Bronson will be talking about the life of traveler and social activist Jessie Ackerman. The Reece Museum and Archives of Appalachia have



the largest collection of Ackerman's items.

October 26: Dr. Steven Wallace from the Gray Fossil Site will be giving a presentation on the natural history of East Tennessee.

November 16: Dr. Angela Keaton from the History Department at

Tusculum College will be giving a talk on regional folk and material culture.

More information of the specific topics of these talks will be available soon. Check the Heritage Alliance website or Facebook page for updates.



The Extraordinary Life of James Baxter Bean

James B. Bean is considered to be the most important dental surgeon of the Civil War era. He was born in Washington County, Tennessee, in 1834. James was the great-grandson of William and Lydia Bean, the first white settlers in Tennessee.

Bean attended Washington College Academy, after which he studied medicine and opened a practice in Micanopy, Florida. He received his dental degree from Baltimore College of Dental Surgery in 1860. Also in 1860, he returned to Tennessee to marry Hester M. Bovell, daughter of Dr. William W. Bovell, in Jonesborough.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Bean moved to Atlanta and became a medical officer for the Confederacy. During this time he invented a dental device, the

"Bean splint," which allowed doctors to successfully treat gunshot wounds to the jaw and face while preventing facial disfigurement and deformities. He personally treated more than one hundred soldiers who had experienced gunshot wounds.

After the war, Bean practiced dentistry in Baltimore. He pioneered a method of casting aluminum plates that proved to be an important step in the development of the casting process used in modern dentistry. In addition to dentistry, Bean also collected many wildlife and ornithological specimens for the Smithsonian Institution.

A lifelong adventurer, Bean died in 1870 at only 36 years of age, when he and ten other climbers were caught in a blizzard on the summit of Mont Blanc in France. Bean recorded his last hours in a



James Baxter Bean (photo from Civil War RX)

notebook that was recovered from his body. Mark Twain included extracts from the notebook in *A Tramp Abroad* (1879). Bean is buried in Chamonix, France.

Legs In a Barrel

(Continued from Page 1)

Despite the suspicions, Mr. Spencer was invited to stay with the Slagle family while in town for Mr. Slagle's funeral. He left the house sometime early the next morning. At daybreak, Mr. Spencer's body was found, face down in a rain barrel at a house across the street from the Slagle home. The authorities in Jonesborough labeled Mr. Spencer's death a suicide.

Two men eventually were arrested for involvement in Mr. Slagle's murder, and they implicated Mr. Spencer as the person who planned the evil deed. Spencer had convinced Slagle that he had found \$200,000 worth of buried gold, and that he would split it with Slagle if Slagle would pay the expenses involved in taking it to New York to sale (the reason Slagle was carrying the large sum of money). The missing money was never recovered.

Another interesting fact: Mr. Spencer had an uncle who was suspected of killing and robbing a man years earlier at almost the same spot on the French Broad River near Newport.

Many doubted the "suicide by rain barrel" of suspected murderer John Spencer, and the questions and possible suspects surrounding the event make good theater more than 100 years later.



Heritage Alliance Provides Eclipse Activities

When an almost total solar eclipse occurred on August 21, Jonesborough closed off downtown to hold an Eclipse Block Party. The Heritage Alliance got in on the fun by providing kids activities downtown.

More than 100 families participated in the projects. One of the most popular activities was the creation of “corona art.” The Heritage Alliance also made pinhole viewers for viewing the eclipse for folks in town.



An example of corona art from 1860, sketch by G. Tempel



Anne G'Fellers-Mason helps kids make “corona art” (photo by Whitney Williams)

Project Updates: Oak Hill School Activities and the Chuckey Depot

Constitution Week Bell Ringing at Oak Hill School: At 1:30 on Sunday, Sept 17, the State of Franklin Chapter of the NSDAR will host their 4th Annual Bell Ringing at Oak Hill School. Bring a chair & your bells. The program includes multiple musical numbers and the little known history of the Battle of The Wabash. Many soldiers from local counties fought and died in the battle in November of 1791.

Chuckey Depot: Renovations to the Chuckey Depot are complete and those attending Jonesborough Days were provided with a sneak peak as the depot opened for limited tours. Construction of the exhibits is under way, with a completion of the project and formal ribbon cutting scheduled for Monday, October 2, at 11:00 a.m.. The museum will be open special hours for the Storytelling Festival and will commence

regular operations (1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Wed - Sat) on Oct 11.

Storytelling Activities: The Heritage Alliance is partnering with the International Storytelling Festival this October to offer old timey children's games at Oak Hill school on Saturday, October 7. The Festival will be hosting children's stories in the schoolhouse again this year.



Volunteer Spotlight: Dana Kehs



Dana Kehs in her Victorian finery waiting to present a walking tour

Dana is one of our newest Heritage Alliance Town Tour guides, having started giving tours this summer. She has lived in the area for about three years, after growing up in Indiana and spending several decades in Florida.

She first came to the area to visit a brother that lived in Johnson City, and was “totally smitten” by Jonesborough and its people - how friendly they were and how much they loved the town. She realized this place was special, and now calls it, “the hometown I never had.” She says there’s always something to do, with so many year-round activities.

She had never been a tour guide before, but as a seamstress, had often made costumes for others. Now that she gets to wear the period dress of Jonesborough’s past, she says she’s “exceedingly honored to get to do it.”

Dana also spends her time helping to care for her four grandchildren, as well as sewing and quilting.

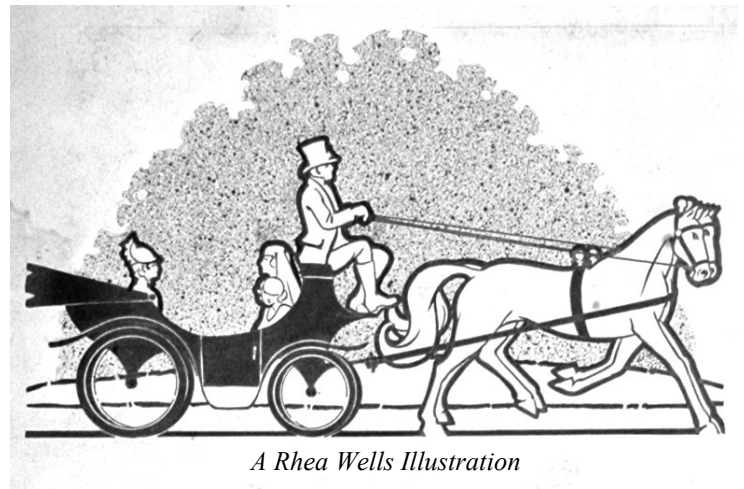
As well as being a tour guide, Dana is participating in local theatrical events such as Legs In a Barrel and making costumes for the Jonesborough Repertory Theater.

Update on Rhea Wells Exhibit and Programs

It was announced earlier this year that the Heritage Alliance has been awarded a grant by Humanities Tennessee to create the exhibit, “Far Away and Close to Home: The Art and Words of Author/Illustrator Rhea Wells.” The project is a partnership with the McKinney Center who will host the exhibit. It will be co-curated by the ETSU Reece Museum.

Rhea Wells (1891-1962) was a native of Jonesborough who is best remembered as an author and illustrator of children’s books published in the early twentieth century.

Right now, we’re in the planning stages of the Rhea Wells exhibit. The exhibit will be available for viewing from January 26 through February 23, 2018 at the McKinney Center. There will be an opening reception/exhibit talk. Other programs



A Rhea Wells Illustration

planned are a literary panel with local educators & librarians. They will discuss the importance of libraries & children’s literature. Also planned is a “make your own book” workshop with the Washington County Library.



Chester Inn Exhibits for Fall

The current Chester Inn State Historic Site & Museum exhibit for fall is "Crime and Punishment." It consists of three parts: the first is "From the Headlines," which presents notable stories from the front pages of regional newspapers from 1930-1965. The second part presents photos and documents of events that occurred between the late 1700's and 1930. These include some artifacts and notes regarding crimes and the penalties paid. The third part of the exhibit provides details on three more sensational cases: the 1909 "legs in a barrel" case, the last public hanging in Jonesborough, and a murder-suicide in Carter county. This exhibit will be on display through the end of September.

Future exhibits over the coming months will include a look at Jonesborough's cemeteries, some "curiosities" of



A padlock and keys that were used in the old Washington County Jail, currently are on display at

death, and ongoing preservation efforts for the Christopher Taylor cabin.

Calendar of Events

- **Chester Inn Museum** open Mon, Wed-Sat from 11-6 and Sun from 1-5. Hrs change at end of October.
- **Town Tours** at 1:00 on Mon, Fri, Sat, & 2:00 on Sun
Mythbusting Tour at 1:00 on Oct 7, Nov 4, & Dec 2
Old Jonesborough Cemetery Tour at 2:30 every Saturday through Oct 14
- **Architectural Salvage Warehouse** open from 8-12 on Sept 16, Oct 7, & Oct 21
- **Constitution Week Bell Ringing** Sept 17 at 1:30 at Oak Hill School
- **History Happy Hour** at 6:30 on Sept 21, Oct 26, & Nov 16
- **Heritage Alliance Presentations at Jonesborough Senior Center** at 1:30 on Sept 18, Oct 16, Nov 13,
- **A Spot On the Hill** 6:30 on Oct 20, 21, & 27, 2:00 show on Oct 28

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From the Director's Desk

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Jonesborough's Progressive Dinner! Over the past 40 years we have celebrated our homes, our community and our stories with so many people throughout the region. In 2017, we continue the celebration, but with a twist that allows us to showcase more restorations, more talent and still have an elegant four course meal!

This special 40th Anniversary event is called *The Colors of Christmas*. It combines two longstanding Jonesborough Holiday offerings, the Holiday Tour of Homes and the Progressive Dinner, into one elegant evening. *The Colors of Christmas* opens 8 historic structures, each decorated in Holiday finery. Storytellers and musicians are featured in various locations during portions of the evening. During *The Colors of Christmas*, you can partake in "An Elegant Repast," a delectable four course meal set in another of Jonesborough's historic buildings. Elaborate entertainment will fill the

space between courses, keeping the Holiday spirit refreshed and relaxed.

Revelers can partake in *The Colors of Christmas* in a variety of ways. Eight historic structures are open for touring on your own with a shuttle available for those who desire. Two seatings of "An Elegant Repast" add fine dining to the festivities and are available for a limited number of guests. "An Elegant Repast" will take place in a handicap accessible building with ample parking for dinner guests to arrive and depart together during the evening. Clearly either of these options is a fine way to kick-off the seasonal celebration; but for the ultimate Holiday experience, a combination ticket for both the tour and "An Elegant Repast" will provide the greatest amount of joy!

The restoration of a building does more than repair old walls and ceilings; it rebuilds connections, strengthens community and restores the spirit. Combining the Holiday Tour of Homes with the Progressive Dinner reconnects the Heritage Alliance and Jonesborough with our early years as leaders in East Tennessee's Historic Preservation

movement. In those heady days, these two events showcased both the benefits and the challenges of restoring an historic structure. They also helped to fund the work. Both events have a strong tradition of volunteers joining in to make it all work. And "*The Colors of Christmas*" is no different. If you have volunteered for either of these events, you know, though it can be hard work, how great it feels to share Jonesborough in such a special way. This year's event is somewhat different from previous years, but we still need volunteers! There are still homes to help decorate and host, an elegant meal to serve, and visitors to greet.

40 years calls for a special celebration. *The Colors of Christmas* reconnects and reinforces old traditions. It celebrates the many good things that result when we join together for the benefit of all. It is fun, it is festive and it is fitting, that in this 40th year, that we look back at where we began. Those beginnings have placed us on the road to a proud and bright future.

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Newsletter printed courtesy
of the Historic Jonesborough
Visitor's Center and the
Town of Jonesborough.

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*Preserving the architectural, historical, and cultural
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