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PHOTOS BY TIM PETERSON/THE CONNECTION

The Virginia Room at the City of Fairfax Library houses references including genealogical records, Confederate service records and archived newspapers.

Unlocking Libraries

BY TIM PETERSON
THE CONNECTION

When Col. Blake Meyers' (U.S. Army, ret.) mother and grandmother died, he inherited boxes of family records that no one had ever taken the time to archive, much less even go through and organize.

"Nobody else wanted it," Meyers said. The Burke resident took the boxes on and endeavored to get their contents straight, becoming a family historian in the highly methodical process. As a Civil War history buff, he was particularly interested in finding out more about his three great-great-grandfathers, who Meyers said all served in the Confederate Army.

"Just putting together the stories of their service," Meyers said, "Two were from the Shenandoah Valley and served in 11th Virginia Cavalry, another was down in Lynchburg in the 11th Virginia infantry.

"It's so interesting to understand what happened to your family," Meyers continued, "all these connections, marriages, births, properties, movements. I've got tax

returns from the early 1900s."

Meyers has already tried his hand at accessing clerk's offices and the national archives to fill in gaps in his research, but he is learning there is much more information out there available to him, if he knows how to look.

The retired colonel is also a member of the Burke Historical Society, which held the first meeting of a new research seminar series the evening of Tuesday, March 1, at the Burke Centre Library.

SOCIETY PROGRAMS CHAIR and Burke resident Brian Slawski gave the program's first presentation about how to access intellectual property records — patents and trademarks, his wheelhouse — for researching family members and local history.

"Personally, when I go to research at a library for the first time, I don't really know where to begin," Slawski said. "That can be intimidating."

This new series for society members (and open to the public) is geared to help reduce that intimidation factor.

"It's part of the mission of the Burke Historical Society," said Slawski, "to get people

interested in history. We want to share the particular skills, experiences that we've had."

Meyers had no idea patents and trademark records might be useful to him before attending the first lecture.

"I thought it was great, a lot of good information," Meyers said. "I was like a sponge, just soaking it all up."

Even professional archivist Chris Barbuschak of Burke picked up a few new moves at the meeting.

"I like learning new things," said Barbuschak, who looks after rare and unusual tomes and records in the Virginia reference room of the City of Fairfax Library, "especially when I can then offer that to library patrons who come in and say, 'Where else can I search?'"

Barbuschak's charges in the reference floor's climate-controlled inner sanctum include 300 collections of manuscripts he is processing to make more accessible to patrons, as well as thousands of rare photos, newspapers and local records like old receipts from the former Davis Store on the outskirts of Clifton.

"There's a goldmine of information in

here," Barbuschak said.

FOR THE APRIL MEETING of the Burke Historical Society's monthly series, Barbuschak will give the society a tour of the rare books room and talk about how to better access library reference materials in house and through databases like The Washington Post, Evening Star and Library of Virginia.

Barbuschak is passionate about getting others to be as interested in researching as he is, how he's been all his life.

"Most people my age are really not into that," said Barbuschak, a 2011 graduate of Loyola in Chicago. But doing local or family research yourself, he said, is motivating regardless of age.

"There's a sense of accomplishment and you learn along the way, you learn about your past," he said. "It's really exciting, like being Indiana Jones yourself."

The Burke Historical Society "Year of Research" seminars are scheduled to take place every first Tuesday of the month, 7-8 p.m. at the Burke Centre Library, located at 5935 Freds Oak Road in Burke. For more information, visit www.burkehistoricalsociety.org.

Matthew Takes on Four More Life Sentences with Guilty Plea for Murders

Jesse L. Matthew, Jr., now 34, will never leave prison. Matthew was already beginning to serve three consecutive life sentences after he entered an Alford Plea for charges of abduction, sexual assault and attempted murder in Fairfax in 2005.

On March 2, Matthew chose to plead guilty to First Degree Murder and Abduction with Intent to Defile related to the deaths of



Matthew

Hannah Graham and Morgan Harrington, both college students at the time, a release from the Albemarle County Commonwealth's Attorney said.

Harrington was a 20-year-old sophomore at Virginia Tech who disappeared from a 2009 Metallica concert in Charlottesville, Va. Graham, a Mount Vernon resident, was in her second year at the University of Virginia

when she went missing in September 2014.

Matthew was indicted in Graham's case in spring 2015 and for Harrington's defiling and death in the fall.

With Matthew's guilty plea, he takes on an additional four consecutive life sentences and waives the right to release or parole for geriatric or any other condition, as well as any right to appeal.

"This resolution serves the interests of justice by ensuring the defendant will never again pose a threat to public safety," Albemarle County Commonwealth's Attor-

ney Robert N. Tracci said in a statement.

"It is consistent with the wishes of the Graham and Harrington families," Tracci continued, "and provides a measure of legal finality in cases that would have been subject to highly public trials and protracted appellate review. The agreement can be attributed to the outstanding work of law enforcement personnel and volunteers who made Hannah and Morgan's cause their own."

—TIM PETERSON