

Burke CONNECTION

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A few dozen people attended the Burke Historical Society's talk on "Everything Burke" on Sunday, Feb. 28, 2018, at Pohick Regional Library.

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FEBRUARY 8-14, 2018

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History Talk on 'Everything Burke'

Burke Historical Society's Brian Slawski gives a tour on Burkes around the world.

BY STEVE HIBBARD
THE CONNECTION

The Burke Historical Society presented a talk by Brian Slawski, 36, its program chair and vice president, on "Everything Burke" at its annual meeting on Sunday, Jan. 28, 2018 at the Pohick Regional Library.

In addition to discussing a history of Burke, Va., the utility patent examiner by day gave brief histories of other Burkes around the world. He made the point that "Burke" didn't really mean "Burke," exclusively; he allowed for variations on the name – such as Burkesville, Ky., and Burkeville, Texas, in addition to places like Burke, Vt., and Burke, N.Y., for example. And since he wasn't able to go to local archives and find primary sources for each of these places, he said he picked from what he could find online.

"It was a bit of a struggle because I can't go to all of these places and look up their local archives. I tried to find as much as I could online. A lot of that was from local historical societies or the municipal websites, or the state historical encyclopedia was online and had entries for different localities," he said.

Here is an edited selection of Brian Slawski's presentation on "Everything Burke:"

BURKE, VIRGINIA

European settlement in the Burke area began in the 1700s, but it wasn't until the Orange & Alexandria Railroad arrived in the 1850s that Burke's Station got its name. The man most responsible for that event was Silas Burke, who served as a director of the railroad as well as an official and entrepreneur in a huge range of other endeavors. Silas Burke died in 1854, and the village's location on the new railroad brought the area some scattered action during the Civil War, including a Christmas 1862 raid by J.E.B. Stuart.

Life settled down in the farming village after the war, but new excitement was brought by Henry Copperthite, an impresario who had made a fortune selling pies in the District. Copperthite bought the Silas Burke House around 1900 and opened a racetrack in 1908 at the site of present-day Burke nursery. The track was a hit with locals and Washingtonians alike, but ran for only about eight years.

Two disasters struck Burke in the mid-20th century. The first was a huge forest fire in 1941, which took several days to put out. The second came 10 years later, when the federal government selected Burke as

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Jon Vrana, President, Burke Historical Society.

PHOTOS BY STEVE HIBBARD/THE CONNECTION



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the site of Washington's new international airport. The town fought hard to get the planners to look elsewhere, finally succeeding when Chantilly was chosen instead. Yet by then many in Burke had sold their land and moved away.

Surplus property was developed as Burke Lake Park or sold at auction. Developers built new suburbs like Kings Park and Burke Centre, and Burke gradually melded into greater Washington. Nonetheless, the small-town atmosphere persists at events like the Burke Centre Festival.

THOSE OTHER BURKES

❖ **Burke, Vermont** - Burke, Vermont, was chartered in 1782 but without settlers for another 10 years. Like a fair number of other Burkes, it was named for Sir Edmund Burke, the British statesman who defended the Colonies in hopes of averting war. Early industries were in potash and lumber, shifting to dairy farming as the forests were cleared. Today Burke sits in the heart of the state's Northeast Kingdom, a term coined by former governor George Aiken in exasperation with the region's independent streak, even by Vermont standards.

❖ **Burke, New York** - Even farther north is Burke of Franklin County, New York; the town's northern border is formed by Quebec province. It was partitioned from the town of Chateaugay in 1844 and named for Sir Edmund Burke.

Industries in Burke over the years included sawmills, grist mills, tanneries, sandstone quarries, and factories for producing starch. The Ogdensburg and Champlain Railroad arrived in the area in 1850. Among Franklin County's more dramatic history, it

was the staging point for some of the Fenian Raids of 1866 and 1870, when Irish-American militias, sympathetic to Irish independence, launched cross-border attacks on the British dominion to the north.

❖ **Burke County, North Carolina** - Burke County lies in west-central North Carolina, along the Catawba River basin. It was founded in 1777 and named for Thomas Burke, one of North Carolina's delegates to the Continental Congress and later governor. During the same period, residents of Burke County would head south to join the Patriot militias in the Battle of Kings Mountain.

❖ **Burke County, Georgia** - As in North Carolina, Burke County, Georgia, was formed in 1777 and was notable for contributions to the Southern theater of the War of Independence, though many residents remained loyal to the Crown.

Two engagements took place in 1779, the first a skirmish at the Burke County Jail, and the second the Battle of Briar Creek. This fighting is recounted by historical markers at the county courthouse, dating from 1857.

Burke County saw fighting again in the Civil War, as Sherman's cavalry under Judson Kilpatrick rode northeast during the March to the Sea.

❖ **Burkesville, Kentucky** - Burkesville is the seat of Cumberland County, Kentucky, named for the early local magnate Isham Burk. In 1768, the Iroquois deeded the land along the Cumberland River to settlers, though the county wouldn't be born for another 30 years.

Burkesville was again three decades ahead of its time in 1829, when a local drill-

Upcoming BHS Events

Burke Historical Society (BHS) meetings are held at Pohick Regional Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Visit www.burkehistoricalsociety.com.

- ❖ **Sunday, Feb. 25, 2018, at 3:30 p.m.** - Heather Bollinger and Jeff Clark: "Lost Towns of Fairfax County." Learn about some of the once-vibrant communities in Fairfax County that have since faded from view.
- ❖ **Sunday, March 25, 2018, at 3:30 p.m.** - Scott Diezman: "Col. John T. Wilder of the Union Army." Learn about Union Col. John Thomas Wilder and his 17th Indiana "Lightning Brigade," whose new Spencer repeating rifles were instrumental in the Tullahoma Campaign of Tennessee.

ing for salt brine wound up striking oil instead. He was disappointed, since no one knew what to do with the stuff. The gusher was known as the Great American well, springing 30 years before the 1859 well at Titusville, Pennsylvania, that's considered the birthplace of the modern petroleum industry. So, what did the folks in Burkesville do with their oil before there were machines to use it?

They bottled it and sold it as medicine, of course. Besides attracting visitors who came to see the well as a curiosity, the oil was sold across the country as a remedy for all kinds of ailments. Speaking of medicine, Burkesville is also thought to have the oldest pharmacy in Kentucky. And speaking of black liquid cure-alls, Burkesville was also the birthplace of the founder of Maxwell House coffee.

❖ **Burke, Wisconsin** - Burke, Wisconsin, is a town of about 3,000 in Dane County. It lies in between Sun Prairie and Madison, and it's due to be annexed by those two cities and the Village of De Forest by 2036. It was founded in 1847 and named for Sir Edmund Burke.

❖ **Burke, Texas** - Burke, Texas is a city of some 700 in Angelina County, part of what's known as Deep East Texas. Built on the longleaf pine savannah, it was founded in 1881 with the arrival of the Houston, East and West Texas Railway, and named for a civil engineer who helped survey the railroad. Prior to that time, the region had been known for growing cotton and raising cattle.

❖ **Burkeville, Texas** - Even deeper in Deep East Texas, right beside Louisiana, is Burkeville. After its 1844 founding and naming for the man who plotted the town, Burkeville was chosen as seat of Newton County in 1848. Yet like Burke to the west, Burkeville would find itself eclipsed by local rivals. A county courthouse was built in Burkeville, but in 1853 another election decided that the upstart settlement of Newton should be county seat instead. Burkeville remained active as a center of local agriculture and trade, serving as a Confederate arsenal during the Civil War, and publishing its own newspaper.

❖ **Burke's Garden, Virginia** - Burke's Garden is a fascinating community in Tazewell County in the southwestern Com

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monwealth. The Garden is Virginia’s highest upland valley, and completely surrounded by Garden Mountain, giving it the nickname “God’s Thumbprint.” The mountain itself abuts the long ridge called Clinch Mountain, immortalized in music by the Carter Family and Ralph Stanley. The valley was formed when limestone caverns collapsed, and the still-eroding limestone provides ideal growing soil.

❖ **Burke Township, Pipestone County, Minnesota** - In southwestern Minnesota, Burke is one of 12 townships making up Pipestone County. The township was incorporated in 1879, the same year that the railroad arrived, and named for Thomas Nicholas Burke, an Irish Catholic theologian sent in 1870 on an exhaustive and well received preaching tour of the United States.

❖ **Burke, Idaho** - Burke, Idaho is a ghost town in Shoshone County, close to the Montana border. Burke’s story began with the 1884 discovery of silver and lead ore in Burke Canyon. Mines and mills quickly sprouted, a railway was built, and Burke was founded in 1887. The most famous operations were the Hercules and Hecla mines, but fortune seekers also came to stake small gold and silver claims. Wyatt Earp arrived in 1884, opened a saloon near Burke in Eagle City, and helped keep the peace before moving on after a few months.

❖ **Burke County, North Dakota** - Burke County is in northwestern North Dakota; adjoining Saskatchewan. It was founded in 1910 and named for John Burke, who served as governor of North Dakota and Secretary of the Treasury under Woodrow Wilson. The county seat is Bowbells, named after the famous bells of the Church of St. Mary-le-Bow in London; the town was established in 1896 on the Soo Line Railroad. The Burke County courthouse is on the National Register, built in 1928.

❖ **Burkeville, Virginia** - Virginia appears to be unique among states of the Union in having three completely distinct Burke-named places. The last of these is Burkeville, a town of about 500 in Southside on the western end of Nottoway County. Burkeville ap-



PHOTOS BY STEVE HIBBARD/THE CONNECTION

Brian Slawski greets guests after his talk on “Everything Burke” on Sunday, Jan. 28, 2018 at the Pohick Regional Library.

pears to be named after the proprietor of Burke’s Tavern, though this isn’t quite certain. At any rate, the tavern dates from the 1820s and is on the National Register. The town came later, with the arrival of the Richmond and Danville and the

Southside railroads in the 1850s.

Slawski also spoke about Burkeville, British Columbia, Canada; Burkes Pass, New Zealand; Bourke, New South Wales, Australia; Burketown, Queensland, Australia.

VOLUNTEER EVENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Fairfax County is offering a Free **Caring for You, Caring for Me** for caregivers of older adults. **Mondays, Feb. 26-March 26, 1-3 p.m.** at Insight Memory Care Center, 3955 Pender Dr., Ste. 100, Fairfax. Find out more at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/OlderAdults (under Hot Topics). Call 703-324-7577, TTY 711.

The **Fairfax Commission on Aging** meets on **Wednesday, Feb. 21, 1-3 p.m.** at the Mount Vernon Government Center, Rooms 2 & 3, 2511 Parkers Lane, Mount Vernon. The public is welcome to attend and join in the comment period that begins each session. Find out more at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/familyservices/older-adults/fairfax-area-commission-on-aging. Call 703-324-5403, TTY 711 for meeting access needs.

Fairfax County’s **Family Caregiver Telephone Support Group** meets by phone on **Tuesday, Feb. 13, 7-8 p.m.** This month’s topic is Maintaining Relationships While Caregiving. Call 703-324-5484, TTY 711 to register.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The Northern Virginia Long Term Care Ombudsman Program needs volunteer advocates for residents in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Contact Lisa Callahan at 703-324-5861, TTY 711 or email Lisa.Callahan@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Meals on Wheels needs **Drivers, Coordinators, and Co-coordinators** for routes throughout the county. Apply online at volunteer.fairfaxcounty.gov.

Fairfax County needs **Respite Care** volunteers to visit and oversee the safety of older adults. Support and training provided. Contact 703-324-5374, TTY 711. Apply online at volunteer.fairfaxcounty.gov.

The **Chronic Disease Self-Management Program** needs volunteer leaders to co-facilitate 2-hour workshops that help people with chronic illnesses. The 6-week program meets in Fairfax County. Training provided. Contact ElderLink at 703-324-5374, TTY 711, or go to www.FairfaxCounty.gov/DFS/OlderAdultServices/chronic-disease.htm. Apply online at volunteer.fairfaxcounty.gov.

Volunteer Opportunities at Senior Centers and Adult Day Health Care Centers

Fairfax/Centreville/Chantilly

❖ The Little River Glen Senior Center in Fairfax is in need of Instructors for the following classes: SAIL, Qigong, Basic Language, Group Fitness, ASL, Computer Lab Assistants, Current Events, ESL, Front Desk Assistance, a Volunteer Coordinator and a Trip Assistant. Apply online at volunteer.fairfaxcounty.gov.

❖ Co-Coordination for Centreville/Chantilly Meals on Wheels Routes – Volunteers needed to oversee and coordinate the driver roster and schedule. Apply online at volunteer.fairfaxcounty.gov.



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