Jennings Randolph and a New Deal for Harpers Ferry

“Problems are truly wonderful because we have the opportunity to solve them.”

The year 2019 dawns bittersweet in Harpers Ferry, the stillness of a pristine view marked by the silence of a government shutdown. Pretty Shenandoah Street, with its cheerful, carefully replicated facades, is a veritable ghost town. Museum doors are locked tight, while snow drifts unchecked against staircases and porches. Winter’s breeze bites more deeply, gnawing at our own uncertainty. How long will this last? Those of us who call the Ferry home search the stones, the bricks, the creaking signs, the hillsides looming over our heads for some answer, some sign that all will soon be well.

We are not the first to stand in this place and ask such questions.

Indeed: If we could thin the layers between the years, we might find ourselves standing beside a pair of gentlemen in this very same spot. Doubtless their expressions are at least as perplexed as ours, for in their world, it is 1936. The scars of the worst flood in history are readily evident everywhere around them, festering with decay. Our familiar street has more buildings, but all of them are sadder, the shuttered doors accompanied by gaping windows, precariously balanced ceilings and exposed beams, and the rankness of mould wafting in between.

With our modern minds we can say it looks, as National Geographic will say a few years later, “like an Italian hill village after the Nazis left.”

“So,” says one of our gentlemen to the other, “I think this should be a national park.”

Preposterous.

But preposterous is the name of the game: Our companions here are none other than Storer College President Henry McDonald, and Congressman Jennings Randolph. It is the Great Depression. Disaster follows upon disaster. Two of the main arteries into Harpers Ferry—the Route 340 bridge over the Potomac, and the Shenandoah toll bridge—have just been severed continued on Page 4
In Memorium

Remembering Bill Theriault

Photo courtesy of Herald-Mail Media.

LONGTIME HFPA MEMBER and historian William Theriault passed away on January 12, 2019. For more than forty years, Bill had devoted himself to the study and sharing of Jefferson County history. Bill received several awards for his contributions to local history including the Certificate of Commendation from the American Association for State and Local History in 1996, and the Distinguished Citizen of Jefferson County Award from the Spirit of Jefferson Farmers Advocate in 2001.

“No one could match Dr. Theriault’s discoveries of history beneath the history,” recalls Dennis Frye, Chief Historian (retired) of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. “Bill didn’t aspire to tell big splashy stories. Instead, his focus always was on the little village—the local people, their local achievements, and their individual potions for living. Few historians could match Bill’s tenacity for discovery - the mark of a most unique historian. And Bill’s willingness to share - his unselfish desire to offer his research to anyone, anywhere at anytime—reflected his generous soul.”

Bill’s unique contributions include the development of the West Virginia Geo-Explorer website, a history resource for students, and a long-running column in the Spirit of Jefferson covering local history and topics. He also authored several publications, including The History of Eastern Jefferson County, How and Where to Look It Up, Volumes 1 through 3; The Jefferson County History Calendar; A History of Shannondale Springs; Julia Davis: A Literary Biography, Volumes 1 and 2; Artisan Bread Baking for Living History Museums; Baking Heirloom Artisan Bread at Home; and The Fourth Estate, Volume One.

We at the Harpers Ferry Park Association extend our condolences to Bill’s family, and our gratitude for his years of service. Bill’s legacy is one that shall surely endure.

Remembering Donna Callar

THE ASSOCIATION WISHES TO extend its sympathy to the family of Donna Callar, 78, who passed away December 15, 2018. Donna was a Charter Member of the Harpers Ferry Park Association. She volunteered in Harpers Ferry National Historical Park’s visitor center beginning in the 1980s, and for the Park Bookshop throughout the past four decades. She was a member of the Harpers Ferry Woman’s Club and the Camp Hill-Wesley United Methodist Church in Harpers Ferry.

Donna served on the Bolivar Town Council from July 2013-June 2017. She was also a member of the Bolivar Building Commission, which was instrumental in developing the Bolivar Children’s Park as well as restoring the Bolivar Spring House.

We are thankful for all of the time and support Donna gave to the park and will miss her quiet strength and fascinating stories of her days as a teacher, principal, and pilot.

Association Awarded Grant for Student Art Contests

HFPA was thrilled to receive a grant from the Eastern West Virginia Community Foundation for a 75th Anniversary Student Photography, Art, and Writing Contest (PAW). The just-announced contest is open to students in grades 6-12 in Jefferson County. The grant allows for the top students in each category to attend workshops with former Artist-in-Residence Louise Minks, award-winning author Kathleen Ernst, and Boys and Girls Photography Club leader Pat Murphy. Winners will be recognized during the 75th Anniversary event in June.
75th Anniversary Speaker Series

“The Machine in the Garden at Harpers Ferry: The impact of the Industrial Revolution on the Built Landscape, the Natural Environment, and Communities.”
April 27, 2 pm | Mather Training Center

Throughout 2019, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park will host several talks led by renowned historians. Join us at Mather Training Center at 2pm, April 27, as we welcome Dr. Paul Shackel, professor of Anthropology at the University of Maryland and former HFNHP archaeologist. During his seven-year tenure at Harpers Ferry, Dr. Shackel’s team helped uncover the social, labor, and class history of the town. His program will focus on the 1990s archeological investigation of Virginius Island.

“Harpers Ferry Armory and the New Technology”
May 25, 2 pm | Lower Town, The Green

In May, the lectern will pass to Dr. Merritt Roe Smith, whose book on the Harpers Ferry Armory was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Dr. Smith is the Leverett and William Cutten Professor of the History of Technology at MIT. Presented on the 200th anniversary of innovator and gunsmith John Hall’s arrival in Harpers Ferry. Dr. Smith’s program will explore the unique role of Harpers Ferry in the industrial revolution. Come discover why this tiny village is called the birthplace of the “American System of Manufacturing.”

This program also includes a private collection viewing of original (some never fired) Harpers Ferry guns ca. 1812-1848, courtesy of HFPA board member Mark Elrod.

This speaker series is presented with financial assistance from the West Virginia Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations do not necessarily represent those of the West Virginia Humanities Council or the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Setting the Scene: Winter 1944

Throughout 2019, we will be celebrating many milestones in the seventy-five year history of Harpers Ferry NHP. To highlight just how special the creation of our park was, consider what else was facing the nation at that time:

January:
• *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* tops the national bestseller list.
• President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposes a second Bill of Rights, guaranteeing items such as healthcare and education to all Americans.
• After 872 days, the German Siege of Leningrad is lifted.

February:
• 187 German planes bomb London, the heaviest bombing since the “Blitz” of 1941.
• Britain and the United States struggle with claims that their Soviet allies are disrespecting the autonomy of Poland—a dispute that will last decades.
• American troops conquer the Japanese-held Marshall Islands.

March:
• *Casablanca* wins Best Picture at the 16th Academy Awards.
• Allies bomb the Vatican.
• Mount Vesuvius erupts, its hot ash destroying approximately 80 American B-25 bombers in the vicinity.
It was Randolph who, through many years of hard lobbying, would finally bring the bill defining Harpers Ferry National Monument to fruition in 1944.

Jennings Randolph continued from page 1

by floodwaters, never to be rebuilt. Homes and businesses are languishing. McDonald thinks federal investment in a park just might save his desperate town. Randolph, in his third term as a U.S. Representative, is known for his support of expansive New Deal philosophies and legislation aimed at building up communities.

Could McDonald convince Randolph to give Harpers Ferry a “new deal” of its own?

Randolph’s own description of his campaign provided a promising answer: “I had an overriding desire to help people to upgrade, to benefit our people.”

Whatever persuasive words and scenes McDonald used on the Congressman, they worked. Randolph latched onto the idea of a national park, and became a much-needed advocate for Harpers Ferry on Capitol Hill. It was Randolph who, through many years of hard lobbying, would finally bring the bill defining Harpers Ferry National Monument to fruition in 1944.

Who was this friend of Harpers Ferry? Born in 1902, Randolph was named for famed orator and politician William Jennings Bryan, a friend of the Randolph family. Randolph’s contemporaries often joked that the name was appropriate, claiming that Jennings, like his namesake, was prone to lengthy speechmaking.

“I believe that our young people possess a great social conscience, are perplexed by the injustices which exist in the world and are anxious to rectify these ills.”

As with most politicians, Jennings was not free of criticism or seemingly inconsistent actions. For instance, while he supported the Equal Rights Amendment, his statements regarding feminist activists were at times less supportive than one might expect.

The Salem, West Virginia, native was first sworn into Congress in 1933, among the “landslide” of Democrats accompanying newly-elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt into office. Arriving penniless in Washington, the young Congressman reportedly had to sell his car to pay off debts accrued on the campaign trail.

Just weeks after taking office, Jennings found himself at the White House, listening to the president discuss the scope and aims of the New Deal - FDR’s signature set of expansive social and economic programs intended to help the country out of the devastating Great Depression. While some representatives tried to dissuade the president from major changes, Randolph was apparently impressed. Later, he recalled thinking that Roosevelt might just be the man to pull the country together.

“Was it wrong,” [Randolph] asked, “to take the unemployed of this country and put them back to work building roads and bridges? Was it wrong for FDR to reopen the banks of this great nation with guaranteed deposits so people no longer would face the threat of losing their lifelong savings? Was it wrong to provide electricity to the country’s rural areas? Or to take the working children out of the lofts and the darkness?”

Jennings Randolph continued from page 1

Shenandoah Street, looking west from corner of High and Shenandoah Streets, 1955. (Harpers Ferry NHP Modern Photo Collection, HAFE-1359_NHF3856)
Jennings Randolph, continued from previous page

at large is indisputable. Following Randolph’s death in 1998, his legacy was repeatedly characterized as something born out of that “Greatest Generation” - an ability and willingness to walk down into the muck and mire of a devastated community and find a way to make things better.

West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd—another longtime supporter of Harpers Ferry—summarized his colleague’s philosophy:

“Jennings Randolph knew that life often demands struggle and many times ends in defeat; but for every problem, Jennings believed that good-willed, intelligent, and decent men and women could find solutions to their mutual and individual problems, if they united their talents in a mutual effort to overcome frustration or evil, or if they but reached into their deepest resources of character.”

Necessity: The Mother of Invention.
March 30-31, 11am-4pm. Lower Town. Out of the smoke and clamor of the industrial revolution, a growing middle class emerged. Learn about this transformative period and its impact on society in Harpers Ferry and beyond.

Women in the Ferry. March 30, 2 pm. Lower Town (Meet on the Green). This Women’s History Month walking tour features stories of writers and artists, slaveholders and those enslaved, witnesses to John Brown’s Raid and the Civil War, business owners and civilians, and the teachers and students of West Virginia’s first historically black college.

Note: in the case of inclement weather this program will be moved indoors.

The Enemy Among Us: Defending Harpers Ferry During the War Of 1812. April 6-7, 11am-4pm.

Lower Town, Harper House. How did America’s second war with Great Britain impact the home of the young U.S. Armory? Visit 1812 recruiters at the town’s oldest structure, Williamson Tavern, where young Margaret (a Harper descendant) encouraged sixty thirsty Armory workers to enlist and defend hearth and home.

Alice Ferguson Foundation Potomac River Watershed Cleanup. April 13, 9am-12pm. Potomac Wayside River Access. This annual event is a great opportunity to help protect the Potomac watershed and give back to this recreational resource.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread. April 20, 1-5pm. Lower Town, behind White Hall Tavern. Bread, called the “staff of life,” was made locally by bakers and confectioners. Visitors are welcome to learn about this trade and see our beehive oven in use! Purchase of fresh baked goods supports HFPA.

Loudoun Heights Hike. April 22, 9:30am. Meet on the Green in Lower Town. Join park rangers for an 8-mile, 5-hour round trip hike to Split Rock, learning about the history of the mountain along the way. Bring your own water, snacks, and lunch. Please note: this is a strenuous hike. The program is limited to 20 participants and pre-registration is required. Call 304-535-2908 to register.

The Birds of Virginius Island. April 27, 10am. Lower Town, The Green. Step outside onto today’s nature-filled Virginius Island for a bird-watching hike with Deb Hale, local birding enthusiast and Potomac Valley Audubon Society volunteer. Bring your binoculars and see if you spot a few of the 170 bird species that call Harpers Ferry home, while following trails that weave past factory ruins and canals. Limited to 30 participants. Pre-registration is required by calling 304-535-2908.

Discover 19th Century Virginius Island. April 28, 9am. Lower Town (Meet at the flood marker on The Green). Explore the 19th century history and industrial ruins of Virginius Island. Learn about the entrepreneurs who endeavored to tap the waterpower of the Shenandoah River at Harpers Ferry and continued on Page 7
Upcoming Historical Trade Workshop

Throughout the year, HFPA sponsors a variety of workshops that allow visitors to step back in time and practice skills of days gone by. Whether your interest lies closer to hearth or forge, there is something for everyone! As always, proceeds from these events benefit park programs. Reservations are strongly suggested for all workshops; please visit our website at www.harpersferryhistory.org to register.

**Art of the Forge: Blacksmithing Workshop.** June 8th and 9th, 10am-4pm. Nineteenth century blacksmiths were crucial to their communities.

Their trade varied from keeping doors on hinges to making weapons at the US Armory for national defense. Learn this historic trade and echo the clang of the hammer on hot iron - just as blacksmiths did 150 years ago!

Fee: $150.00. This two-day program is limited to participants age 18 and up.

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Upcoming Park Events

**African American History Hike.** April 28, 1pm. Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC). Former Harpers Ferry NHP ranger David Fox leads this two hour hike visiting sites of significance to African American and Civil War history. Tour begins at the ATC, 799 Washington Street, and concludes at John Brown’s Fort. This tour is held in partnership with ATC and the Harpers Ferry-Bolivar Flip Flop Festival.

**City Farming: Food in the Backyard.** May 11-12, 11am-4pm. Lower Town, The Green. Purchase heirloom vegetables and seeds from the bookshop to start your own kitchen garden. Plant and seed sales support HFPA.

**Defend and Protect: Arming America’s Soldiers.** May 25-26, 11am-4pm, Lower Town. Special exhibits and programs highlight the establishment and technology of the Harpers Ferry Armory. A special tour and historic weapons firing demonstration will occur each day.

**Save the Date: 75th Anniversary Weekend.** June 28-30. Mark your calendars for this weekend of very special programs! If you are a park alumni who worked, interned, or volunteered at Harpers Ferry NHP please email us at info@hfpa.wv.org or call 304-535-6881 to be added to our contact list for updates and invitations to special alumni events.

**HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK**

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☐ $500 Armory Superintendent – For supporters (individual and corporate) who wish to perpetuate Association and Park education programs.

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