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## BRIEFS

# Simplicity Parenting And Open House at RWS



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**A**S PART OF Richmond Waldorf School's ongoing Parent Education series, RWS will host a Simplicity Parenting workshop led by guest speaker, Raelee Pierce, a parent educator and coach for more than 20 years. This event which will be at 5:30 pm October 20, is open to the public and geared towards parents of children, age birth through 2nd grade.

RWS will also offer an Open House on November 5 from 10am till 12pm. This event is open to prospective parents who are interested in exploring Waldorf education and the enrollment opportunities from preschool through 8th grade. RSVP is required and children are invited. To reserve a spot please visit [RichmondWaldorf.com/open-house](http://RichmondWaldorf.com/open-house)

*Richmond Waldorf School*  
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### NORTHSIDE ART SHOW AT LGRA BENEFITS FEEDMORE

Northside artists will present their work from 11 am till 5 pm on November 19 at Lewis Ginter Recreation Association. Get a head start on your holiday shopping from a wide selection of paintings, drawings, woodwork, ceramics, photographs and much more. Live music by local musicians, and two open bars donated by the artists. Ten percent of all sales benefit Feed-

More. Last June's event raised more than \$1200 for this worthy cause.

*Lewis Ginter Recreation Association*


3421 Hawthorne Avenue  
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Painting by Northside artist.

### ANTIQUÉ VILLAGE CELEBRATES 51 YEARS

Fifty-one years ago Antique Village first opened its doors, selling only antiques and collectibles. It is the oldest antique mall in Central Virginia.

Consistently praised by travelers and locals as a mall with "true and antiques and collectibles", the Village and its 50 dealers are going all out for its anniversary weekend, October 29 and 30. The amazing variety of merchandise inside the mall will be enhanced by 20 outside vendors both days. (For more information see our display ad in this issue of NORTH of the JAMES. )

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## DIVERSIONS

# Cold Harbor

## Is it as Chilling as the Name Suggests?

by FAYERUZ REGAN

**M**UCH ADO HAS been made about the Civil War ghosts of the Petersburg battlefield. But what many don't know is that one of the bloodiest skirmishes in American history took place just ten miles northeast of Richmond. It was the Battle of Cold Harbor, and locals say the battlefield is rife with supernatural activity.

It's an immersive historical site. There's a visitor's center, cannons in the field, and a drive-through tour of the forest. Visitors can pull into small gravel lots to read historical markers, monuments, see earth-work trenches (likely riddled with bullets), and stretch their legs on the many hiking trails.

But I also wanted to check out the, well, vibes. Some people feel that the term “vibes” is overused nowadays, but to me, it describes that intangible sixth sense. An instinctual feeling that can be tied to certain places. It can feel joyously familiar, like the first time I visited my friend's bay house. Or it can feel ominous, like the study in my grandparents' basement. And these feelings arise without explanation.

The facts of the battle are shocking. According to History.com, 7,000 Union soldiers lost their lives within the first hour, compared to 1,500 on the Confederate side. An employee at the battlefield suggested that it could have been 3,500 Union casualties within that hour, but that the scene was so bloody and disorienting, that accurate counts were taken only after the smoke cleared. Nevertheless, about 13,000 lives were lost in just a few days. It was a lopsided battle and a sad defeat for the Union Army. Ulysses S. Grant wrote, “I have always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made. At Cold Harbor no advantage whatever was gained to compensate for the heavy loss we sustained.”

The situation seemed doomed from the start. When troops arrived, they were greeted by the



View of Cold Harbor.

corpses and skeletons that remained on-site from a battle two years prior, known as the Battle of Gaines Mill. In the chaos of war, locals lacked the manpower to collect the bodies. And when the Union troops arrived, they were already demoralized. Exhausted from the trek and lacking provisions, they could barely take the summer heat and the sight of dead comrades on the field.


For such a massacre to have taken place, it's not surprising that locals experience strange phenomena. They describe a low-lying mist that only appears over the battlefield. It's said to be reminiscent of cannon smoke seen in battle, and that it disappears as quickly as it arrives, around 1:00 a.m. Neighbors have complained about the sound of “phantom” cannon blasts. Visitors come at night to witness the infamous orbs of light that float through the forest and the battlefield. An easy online search provides YouTube videos documenting both the mist and the orbs.

My family and I arrived on a sunny day and took a leisurely drive through the forest, stopping to read markers and hike the trails. We had hoped that our many photos would capture something unusual. It was a beautiful, albeit uneventful, tour. That is, until we visited the eerie Garthwright house across from the battlefield.

We were technically alone there, but it didn't feel like it. Union troops had commandeered the Garthwright family's home, locking the

inhabitants in the basement. It was then converted into a field hospital. Catastrophically injured soldiers received rudimentary treatment. About 100 men died and were haphazardly buried in the front yard.

As the Garthwright family cowered in the basement surrounded by screams of agony, a section of ceiling dripped through with blood. Union surgeons performed amputations right above them. This was traumatizing for the family, and it's been said that the spirit of the family's little girl still haunts the area. Neighbors have seen her staring out from an upstairs window in the vacant home. There's a family graveyard beside the house from the 1700s. When we peeked inside the brick walls, we saw that the entire cemetery was overgrown, with no grave markers in sight.

I've had friends describe the battlefield as chilling, while others call it a great hiking spot. A Cold Harbor employee described a “square, military man” running into the visitor's center in a panic, because he felt an ice-cold patch of air in the forest – in mid-summer. This underrated historical site is a lovely place to take in the changing leaves. May you find whatever vibes you're looking for. 

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<https://www.nps.gov/rich/learn/historyculture/cold-harbor.htm>

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# THE VIRGINIA STATE FAIR

## A MEMORY MAKER

### OUR FAMILY HAS A LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE

State Fair of Virginia. A brief affair that never lasts more than ten days, but is packed with memories that persist for a lifetime.

It all started back in the early fall of 1998 when my daughter, Catherine, was about a year and a half old. Her very first ride was in the kiddie section. It was called the Killer Whales and featured eight hollowed out orcas that paraded at a snail's pace in a circle with a few slight ups and downs. We had to ask the operator to stop the ride; it was too scary for this little girl who would go on to ride every gut-churning amusement from Kings Dominion to Bush Gardens, and can now scale sheer bluffs with bare hands and bouldering shoe-clad feet.

Five years after that first excursion to the Fair, Catherine's brother, Charles, joined us, and she would often ride tandem with him in a stroller built for one. And Charles's other sibling, Miranda, like another sister to Catherine and another daughter to me, would accompany us. They all loved the Midway and the State Fair food. But mainly it was the animals. At that time the State Fair was still held out at the Fair Grounds on Laburnum Avenue, just a hop, skip and jump from our home in Bellevue.

In those days we would often go to the Fair four or five times with different groups of people, and sometimes with a whole class from Holton Elementary School. We spent most of our time in the animal and livestock exhibits, watching the birth of calves, petting goats, staring in wonder at the perpetual motion machine of ducklings lured by feed waddle up the steps of a min-

ature ladder and then slip gently down a sliding board into a small pool of water, and once on dry land they would each begin the process again: It never stopped. Of course, there were the pig races and the horse competitions and the side-shows and the Farm Bureau Pavilion. And in the wondrous world of Young MacDonald's Farm, for more than an hour my kids would watch through a pane of glass as chicks pecked through their shells, casting off the last vestiges of their incubation, to glimpse light and to taste air for the very first time.

For many years, just as sure as the State Fair arrived, the first hard rains of autumn would arrive in all their wet fury. Even during the rains though we would often venture through the mud, dressed in makeshift ponchos.

The State Fair of Virginia has a long and storied past. The very first State Fair in Virginia was held in that green space we now call Monroe Park in the very heart of Virginia Commonwealth University. That was back in 1854, and there it remained for the next five years, at which time it relocated to the site now occupied by the Science Museum of Virginia. It was canceled two years later when Edmond Ruffin, a native Virginian, then a private in the Palmetto Guard down in South Carolina, fired a shot from a 64-pounder columbiad cannon at Fort Sumter, which, in effect, started the Civil War.



*The ducklings at Young McDonald's Farm.*

Even after the surrender at Appomattox it took some time to resuscitate the Fair, which finally reopened in 1869 to large, war-weary crowds, as Richmond began its long recuperation from a war that had flattened the city.

Things went along well until a few years before the turn of the century when the fair's sponsor, the Virginia State Agricultural Society, accrued enormous debts that led again to the fair's cancellation.

Ten years later, just after the dawn of the twentieth century, the State Fair was again resurrected. This time it was operated by a company called the Virginia State Fair Association, and was moved to the current location of The Diamond on what is now called Arthur Ashe Boulevard. It would be interrupted

for a few years as the nation fought two world wars.

Then in 1946 the Virginia State Fair Association became Atlantic Rural Exposition Inc. and moved the Fair to Strawberry Hill just off Laburnum Avenue in Henrico County, where it remained until 1999 when Atlantic Rural sold the fair complex to Richmond International Raceway for \$47 million. The fair had plans to move to a location in Varina but things fell apart, and in 2002 they rented back their old space at Strawberry Hill from Richmond International Raceway.


A year later Atlantic Rural Exposition bought Meadow Farm, birthplace of Triple Crown winner Secretariat, in Caroline County. They paid \$5.3 million for the property and reorganized as the State Fair of



*Catherine and Charles on the slide.*

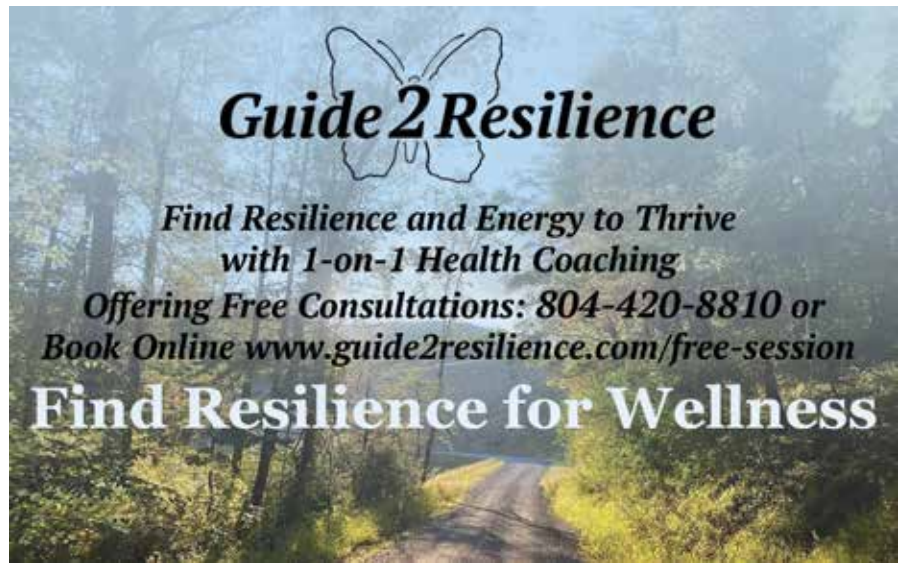
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*Charles with his sister, Miranda, right.*

Virginia, Inc.

In 2008 the State Fair broke ground on an \$81 million complex called Meadow Event Park, and the following year the first State Fair was held at the Caroline site. Three years later the State Fair was attended by a record number of visitors. Unfortunately, the State Fair of Virginia Inc., citing stock losses and debts of about \$75 million, filed for bankruptcy.

In 2012 the State Fair of Virginia and the Meadow Event Park were purchased at a foreclosure sale by Mark Lovell, a Tennessee fair owner, for \$5.67 million.

Within the year, the Virginia Farm Bureau bought it all, and has been operating it ever since.

"What resonates the most for me is how the State Fair has persevered through world wars and weather woes and pandemics and still managed to continue on, and how what we do is such a family tradition for people," says Marlene Jolliffe, who has served as executive director

of the State Fair for the past seven years.

Marlene tells me that Fair goers enjoy anything related to agriculture. "We have so many critical components that gel and the end product is something that is both very raw and real in the agricultural piece," she says. "We continue to really focus on educating people about how their food gets on the table. So you bring that real, rural farming agricultural story to the masses and you do it by also entertaining them at the same time, so people learn and have fun. I think I hang my hat on that. That's what we do differently than theme parks and other entertainment attractions."

And aside from the Midway, there are scores of other entertainment opportunities at the State Fair. There are live music events held daily, along with strolling acts that entertain the wandering crowds. Over its ten-day run this year, the State Fair provided more than 350 hours of live entertainment.

This year the Fair also added a brand new attraction. "I'm really proud of the Triple Crown Circus that we invested in this year," says Marlene. "It was fantastically produced. No animals, just all aerial acts and comedic acts. It was a huge hit."

Every year the State Fair tweaks itself to make the event better for all those in attendance. "We had our daily guide printed in Spanish this year for the first time," Marlene says. "We added some Spanish signage. We're trying to do better at some key things that make different audiences feel comfortable here."

And the State Fair wouldn't be a state fair without the blue ribbon awards. Back in high school, my daughter, Catherine, entered a piece of her artwork that won her a ribbon and a \$300 scholarship. When I ask Marlene about the scholarships, she says, "Since 2013 we've awarded \$670,000 in scholarships."

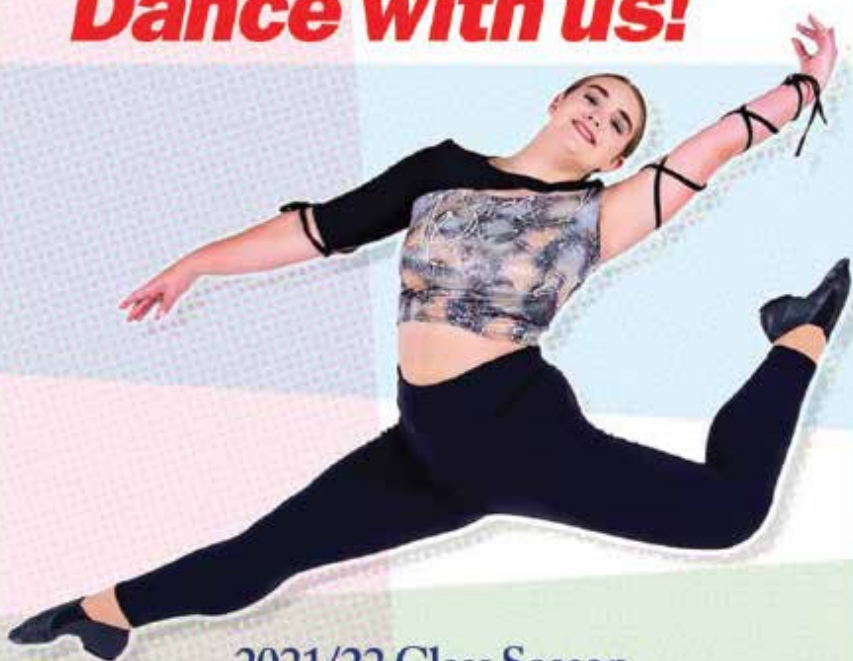
This year, the kids in Mrs. Jennifer Mazza's class at Hermitage High School in Henrico County won the First Place Blue Ribbon for their landscaping entry.

Of course there are other competitions that folks enter—including those for culinary arts. For many years, our good friends Alane Cameron Ford and her children, Jefferson and Lorelei, would all enter their handiworks, culinary and otherwise, at the State Fair. As the kids became teenagers and young adults their interest in these con-



*First place blue ribbon went to Mrs. Jennifer Mazza's students at Hermitage High School in Henrico County.*

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“It seemed like an integral part of fall for them,” says Alane’s husband, Phil Ford, also a good friend. “A wonderful family bonding moment and a chance to share their wonderful creativity. I would watch and support them, but never thought I had the wherewithal to participate.”

As the kids lost interest, Phil stepped up to the plate. “That’s when I decided I would make it something Alane and I could do as a couple together,” he says. “And while my skills and experience in the State Fair cram are not as seasoned as Alane’s, I had a great time this year coming up with this dish for the VA Peanut Growers Savory Entree competition.”

And it is culinary perfection: I sampled one last week. It starts with homemade waffles, the batter of which is laced with peanut butter, and keep in mind this rapid sandwich is a tribute to products Virginia is famous for. The waffles are spread with a generous portion of crunchy peanut butter, and then there are subsequent layers of thinly sliced celery, Granny Smith Apples, and Kite’s Virginia country ham. To top it off: a schmear of hot pepper relish.



Phil Ford’s entry-- the VA Sandwich.

“And while it did not win any ribbons, I stand behind this sandwich,” says Phil.

Phil’s VA Sandwich also created a new memory, which is what the State Fair seems to be about. As its executive director, Marlene Jolliffe told me, “I hear a lot of stories about the memories people have of the Fair, and that makes me smile.”

Here then are memories my children wrote about the State Fair of Virginia.

### Catherine Rose McGuigan

Growing up, the State Fair always signaled a sort of excitement that couldn’t be found at any other point throughout the year. It was the smell of fried foods, musty straw and ani-



Catherine at her first State Fair.

mal fur, greased gears; it was the bleating of goats, the rickety clanking of rides, the screams of excitement. More than anything, though, it was sheer, unbridled exhilaration and chaos. Let loose, my childhood friend and I would run somewhat rampant through the bustling aisles of food stalls and animal tents, making our way to the rides.

We’d spend what felt like hours on things that would now make my stomach a little more than upset. We’d dare to see who could do the unthinkable in the presence of centripetal force—who could press forward against it, or who could even turn upside down.

The fairgrounds always felt like a whole other world. It seemed crazy that they could fit so much stuff into such a finite area. Each area was, in my mind, segmented into different realms. As a child, it was always fun to venture between “realms,” moving from the Rides to the Petting Zoo to the Food Court.

I have fond memories of a parade that used to happen. I don’t know if it was every night, or once a week. But it felt like something that might have been pulled out of Ray Bradbury’s “Something Wicked This Way Comes.” It felt like the circus and the Fair, with all their wild—sometimes unsavory—folks, had meshed together and would make their way throughout the fairgrounds just as it would hit dusk. There’s something magical, happy, and a little sinister about that very autumnal memory.

Now that the fairgrounds are in Caroline County (and perhaps, too, that I’m older), I don’t go to the fair. It’s different, not being able to see the giant Ferris wheel looming over Laburnum Avenue, and not catching the faint scent of funnel cakes



Catherine at her first State Fair.

a mile away. It does, however, continue to hold a special place in my mind. It's always brought back by the changing of the leaves and the cooler temperature, reminding me of those days that I'd skip school to go lose myself to the wild thing that was the State Fair.

**Charles Brandon Rapp McGuigan**

Over the years, I have spent time

at the State Fair with my family, friends and co-workers. I remember my dad and my sister riding the Dragon roller coaster with me, and visiting under the circus tents. Years ago, my mom and my sister Miranda, and Miranda's friend, Carrie, went to the fair and had the best of times. I've played games and won prizes. I rode the bumper cars and the Ferris wheel and the Scrambler.

I went on the merry-go-round over and over again, and the music that played always made me feel good. The food was memorable, as well. What we mainly wanted were the funnel cakes and the cotton candy.

But the thing about the State Fair that I think me and my friends will never forget was seeing the animals. When I was in elementary school our class went to the Fair on field trips. Last year, me and my dad, and all of my Stir Crazy Cafe co-workers went to the Fair and stayed until closing. These are the memories that I will keep in my mind forever. **[B]**

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LICENSED in VIRGINIA 

# Storied Strings: Fascist Killers

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

## HE MAY HAVE BEEN

**S** born in Spain, but the guitar, this European immigrant, assimilated so thoroughly into the American tapestry that you'd swear she was a native daughter.

The VMFA's latest exhibition pays homage to this stringed instrument that for the past two centuries has defined American music in all its permutations. Curator Dr. Leo Mazow creates an utterly immersive experience of sight and sound, and more.



Woody Guthrie, Al Aumuller

Leo, shortly after joining the VMFA staff, was responsible for one of the museum's most memorable exhibitions in recent years—Edward Hopper: The American Hotel. Remember the actual hotel room that you could peer into through glass panes, a room that was scooped out of Edward Hopper's 1957 painting "Western Motel," a room that people were even able to rent out for the night at a price.

Well, for Storied Strings: The Guitar in American Art, Leo's genius is at it again. As a sort of omphalos to the exhibit, the staff has built a fully functional recording studio. So over the next several months, guitar-wielding songwriters from across the country will record sessions that museum patrons can watch through the massive plate glass windows that look into the sound studio. And after the exhibition ends on March 19, the VMFA will produce a video called Richmond Sessions '22-'23 on its

YouTube channel which will feature interviews with the musical artists, as well as their recording sessions.

During the media preview I catch up with Leo Mazow, and he tells me that just a day ago he gave an impromptu tour of the exhibit to one of hard rock's stalwarts.

"I got a phone call yesterday from someone at the front desk saying that there's some guy here who wants to get in to see the exhibition," he says. The receptionist told Leo the man had a full beard and claimed to be with ZZ Top.

"I thought it was a colleague pulling a prank on me," says Leo. "But I went down to the front desk, and it was Billy Givings. We had a nice walk through the exhibition. He's a big guitar collector and he's delightful." Billy presented several VMFA employees with passes to the band's show that was held at Altria that same evening. "He is a mensch if ever there was one," Leo tells me.

Michael Taylor, the VMFA's chief curator and deputy director for art education, approaches the podium and begins to talk about the exhibition. "The show you're going to see explores the guitar as a visual subject, enduring symbol, and story-



Odetta, Otto Hagel, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.

telling companion," he says. "You'll see more than a hundred captivating works of art, including paintings, drawings, watercolors, photographs and sculptures. But there are also thirty-five actual guitars featured



Jessie with Guitar, 1957, Thomas Hart Benton, Jessie Benton

in the exhibition, including some played by some of the pioneer musicians who shaped the American sound."

A little later, Leo Mazow stands before the microphone. "The guitar is a recurring emblem in American paintings, sculptures, and works on paper," he says. "This instrument figures very prominently in the visual stories Americans tell themselves about themselves, their histories, identities and aspirations. The rich trajectory of guitar symbolism in American art illuminates critical matters of gender, ethnicity and race."

And then he says this about the exhibit: "It's an intellectual show and all, but I also hope that this is a fun exhibition, too."

That it is.

For the next hour and a half my son Charles—clicking away with his camera—and I slowly move through the exhibition, absorbing each and every piece. Among the many photographs and paintings there are several that resonate from memory, including Thomas Hart Benton's oil painting on masonite of his daughter Jessie with a guitar, as well as the iconic photograph of Woody Guthrie strumming his guitar which bears the legend: THIS MACHINE KILLS FASCISTS.

And there are so many surprises along the way. Photos of Odetta and a very young Bob Dylan, and several

depictions (photos and paintings) of Huddie William Ledbetter, better known as Lead Belly, one of the masters of the twelve-string, and of musical genres as varied as the blues and folk and gospel.

There are also several kiosks scattered through the exhibition that feature vintage film clips with sound. Among them is a short reel of an extremely young Bob Dylan performing in an alleyway, presumably in New York. Another features Lead Belly. He plays and sings "Goodnight, Irene" in a parlor setting with a small group of people. The guitar he strums with open hand is battered, and wears the scars of the places it's been and the songs it's sung.

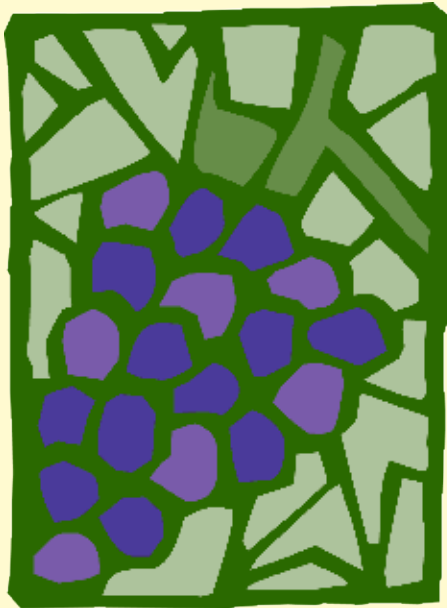
I don't know if it was intended as a joke or not, but one of the very last



Goodnight Irene, Charles White, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

things you'll see, near the exit, is a photograph of Ted Nugent. Well-placed and well-played. **🎸**

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# Dr. Walter Plecker and VA Eugenics

## In Black and White

by JACK R. JOHNSON

**H**IS TITLE SOUNDED harmless enough: the state registrar of vital statistics in Virginia from 1912 to 1946. Yet, as innocuous as it sounds, Dr. Walter Plecker's daily work managed to stigmatize every Afro-American in the state of Virginia, remove every trace of Virginia Indians from state records (a kind of paper genocide), and finally provide a tidy template for Hitler's own genocidal work with the Jews.

To give some sense of Dr. Plecker's world view, in a 1924 speech before the American Public Health Association, he claimed that when the English, Dutch and Scottish landed on the shores of North America, they came "to found a civilization of the highest type, not to mix their blood with the savages of the land, not to originate a mongrel population." The fatal error, Plecker said, was made in 1619 when the Dutch introduced African slaves to North America. "The problem was not slavery," he explained, "but the presence of the negro in what should be a white man's land."

A taciturn fellow who reportedly never smiled, Plecker worked with the white-supremacist Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America to persuade the Virginia state legislature to pass the now infamous 1924 Racial Integrity Act.

"Let us turn a deaf ear to those who would interpret Christian brotherhood as racial equality," Plecker wrote in an essay supporting the act. This was the white man's land.

The Racial Integrity Act not only forbade marriage between any white person and any "colored" person, but also defined a person as white only if they had "no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian." It required that every birth in the state be recorded by race with the only options being "White" or "Colored." The law also made it a felony to false-

ly register a person's race on a birth, death or marriage certificate. For nearly a half-century, it was the law of the land in Virginia.

According to the Washington Post, "The act didn't just make blacks in Virginia second-class citizens — it also erased any acknowledgment of Indians, whom Plecker claimed no longer truly existed in the commonwealth." They were all to be classified as 'colored.' With a stroke of a pen, Virginia eliminated the identity of the Pamunkey, the Mattaponi, the Chickahominy, the Monacan, the Rappahannock, the Nansemond and the rest of Virginia's tribes.

Like many white supremacists groups of his time, and of today, there was a fear that "amalgamation" or so called "race mixing" would lead to the "destruction" of Anglo-Saxon civilization. In this, we can hear echoes of the tiki torch laden chants from Charlottesville, circa 2017: "You will not replace us!" White Americans had to be on guard, Plecker explained, because the "mongrel" offspring of racial intermixture would nefariously try to pass themselves off as white. Towards this end, Plecker identified several Virginia counties with large Indian populations that he believed were home to large "mixed bloods" and assembled a list of surnames. He instructed that anyone with those names must be classified and treated as "colored."

Today, the Indians call it Plecker's hit list.

Virginia's use of birth certificates to police racial purity had severe consequences. At the time, being re-classed from white to "colored" effectively transformed them into second-class citizens. "It forbade giving your child an Indian name," Steve Adkins, the 69-year-old chief of the Chickahominy tribe said, "And it caused people like my mom and dad to have to go to Washington, D.C., to be married as Indians. ... It caused separations of families. It was



Graphic by Catherine McGuigan

devastating."

Yet, Plecker was apparently proud of his efforts, "Public records in the office of the Bureau of Vital Statistics, and in the State Library, indicate that there does not exist today a descendant of the Virginia ancestors claiming to be an Indian who is unmixed with negro blood," he wrote. In other words, he had succeeded in eliminating Virginia Indians, at least on paper. They were all now classified as 'colored.'

In 1932, Plecker gave a keynote speech at the Third International Conference on Eugenics in New York. Among those in attendance was Ernst Rudin of Germany who, 11 months later, would help write Hitler's eugenics law.

In 1935, Plecker wrote to Walter Gross, the director of Germany's Bureau of Human Betterment and Eugenics. He outlined Virginia's racial purity laws and asked to be put on a mailing list for bulletins from Gross' department. Plecker complimented the Third Reich for sterilizing 600 children in Algeria who were born to German women and black men. "I hope this work is complete and not one has been missed," he wrote. "I sometimes regret that we have not the authority to put some measures in practice in Virginia."

Virginia actually came close with its own sterilization law, the Eugenic Sterilization Act, enacted the same year as the Racial Integrity Act, that allowed the state to sterilize 7,000 people "afflicted with hereditary forms of insanity that are recurrent, idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness or epilepsy." but it was never applied as widely nor as viciously as the Nazis.

Maybe the only good story about Pecker era came near his end, from the Washington Post. On Aug. 2, 1947, a year after retiring, Plecker stepped into a Richmond street without looking and was hit and killed by a passing city bus. He was 86 years old.

"That was good for us," said Steve Adkins, chief of the Chickahominy tribe, when he talked about Plecker's death. Said another member of the tribe, "I know it's kind of cruel to say this, but I hope the last thing he saw was an Indian -- driving that bus."

Considering the historical context, that would seem only fair. **NJ**



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## BOOK REVIEW

# Seeing the Forest For the Trees

by **FRAN WITHROW**

**LYNDSIE BOURGON'S** book, "Tree Thieves: Crime and Survival in North America's Woods," is a real eye-opener. Bourgon traveled along the west coast of North and Central America to focus on the problem of timber poaching. She shares the personal stories of people on both sides of the issue as she highlights the problems surrounding this topic few of us know about.

The subject is complex. On one hand, loggers kept communities alive for generations, with jobs handed down from father to son. On the other hand, as trees were cut down en masse, the logging industry began to dry up. People started to realize the ramifications of deforestation and rallied to protest. Many loggers, now jobless, turned to poaching timber.

Protecting the forest is difficult. Park rangers struggle to stop the poaching in woods that are almost too vast to monitor. Also, it can be dangerous to confront a poacher, and some officials have lost their lives defending the trees. Cameras installed in various areas only rarely identify a poacher. Trust is low between rangers and former loggers.

There's more. Some trees (and parts of trees) are so valuable poachers are willing to take the risk of being caught. For instance, while redwood tree timber is in high demand, their burls are even more greatly prized. Burls are large protuberances a redwood tree creates after being damaged. The burls are so perfect they don't need to be stained, just polished. Poachers will carefully cut out the burls, often doing irreparable damage to the redwood, and attempt to cover their theft with forest detritus. It is often just by chance that the vandalism is discovered.

Timber poaching is rampant worldwide. An astounding 30 percent of the wood trade is illegal. (In Cam-

bodia, for instance, it is an appalling 90 percent.) Scientists are now building a database of tree DNA so wood samples can be matched to find out where a piece of wood originated. This can help identify whether wood has been illegally felled or not. If this effort is successful, it will be another tool in protecting the California redwoods and other trees around the world.

The plight of former loggers needs to be addressed as well. Research shows that separating forests from people in an effort to protect the trees doesn't work. This realization has led to another innovation: the creation of community forests, which are now spreading across British Columbia. These forests are leased to nearby communities, many of which are managed by indigenous people. The communities are responsible for maintaining their forests by careful logging, firefighting, and even doing scientific studies. This is creating many new jobs, but also fosters people's connection with the forests and heightens their desire to protect them.

"We trust in the trees," says Jose Jumannanga, president of Comunidad El Naranjal in Peru. "This is the essence of the forest, and it takes care of us."

Bourgon's thought-provoking book shows just how challenging it is for us to take care of the forest as well.

**[E]**

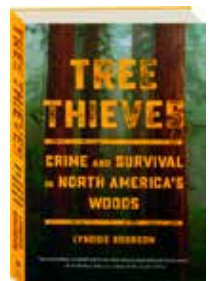
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