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Burgers in Their Own Words

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In the early 1960s, the 1949 Nobel Prize winner in literature gave a series of lectures at The University in Charlottesville where he was writer-in residence. Among other things, he told his hosts:

I like Virginia, and I like Virginians. Because Virginians are all snobs, and I like snobs. A snob has to spend so much time being a snob that he has little left to meddle with you, and so it's very pleasant here.

. . . Let me define what I mean by a snob. A snob is someone who is so complete in himself and so satisfied with what he has that he needs nothing from anybody. That when a stranger comes up, he can accept that stranger on the stranger's terms, provided only the stranger observe a few amenities of civilization. And to me that's what Virginians do. They never push at me. They will offer me their hospitality and they will accept me. All I have to do is just behave decently.

This observation came from William Faulkner of Mississippi and was, judging from my experience, right on the mark. This is not intended as a criticism or a complaint, for I was raised in Knoxville, Tennessee. Knoxville is similar to Lynchburg in its climate and beautiful scenery, and, in the 1940s and 50s when I was growing up there, its inhabitants shared many of the attitudes I encountered when I came to Lynchburg in 1984. So, for me at least, Thomas Wolfe's dictum was disproved: "You *can* go home again." William Faulkner's Virginia "snobbery" or, looking at it another way just being left alone, was something I took for granted in Knoxville at an early age. I received my first culture shock, not when I went to New York City for graduate study, but immediately after I received my bachelor's degree from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, entered the army on active duty, and was assigned to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. As soon as I arrived, people wouldn't let me alone and were peppering me with countless questions, many of which I thought were none of their business. Having subsequently lived in Alabama and North Carolina, my experience has taught me that this syndrome prevails in other parts of the South too.

When my family and I moved to Lynchburg in 1984, we tried to behave decently, and, sure enough, like William Faulkner we were offered hospitality in the Virginia tradition. One of those who was most generous in assisting me was the late John D. Owen Jr. I soon realized that I was only one of many people John went out of his way to help, and that he unobtrusively supported a wide variety of good causes in Lynchburg. If you knew John well, as I'm sure many of you did, you were aware that he had a wonderful, somewhat mischievous sense of humor, which included being able to laugh at the folkways of his home town. "The first thing you need to know," he

warned me “is that in Lynchburg everybody is related to or knows everybody else.” He told me with great gusto the story of two Lynchburgers who were heatedly arguing the merits of a third Hill City citizen who was not present. After a lengthy discussion, the advocate of the man in question apparently clinched his case with the irrefutable statement, “Well, after all, he was born in Lynchburg.” “Yes,” countered his opponent, “But his *father* wasn’t!”

John could laugh at that story, not only because it *was* funny but because *his* father *had* been born in Lynchburg. And John also knew that there was more than a grain of truth in it. I hope you have all have read Rebecca Yancey Williams’ book *The Vanishing Virginian*, a fond portrait of her father Cap’n Bob Yancey, who was commonwealth’s attorney in Lynchburg for many years during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and also served as mayor. (*The Vanishing Virginian* was made into a movie, which had its world premier right here in Lynchburg in 1942 at the Paramount Theatre.) In her book, Rebecca Yancey Williams wrote:

Lynchburg is a typical Virginia small town, since it has never had much influx from the outside world. Almost every family that lives there now has lived thereabout for at least a hundred and fifty years.

Cap’n Bob Yancey’s family *did* go back in this area 150 years; sadly his wife’s did not. Despite this handicap, in 1935, Mrs. Rosa Faulkner Yancey published a book of history and genealogy titled *Lynchburg and Its Neighbors*, which is still useful and has recently been reprinted. “Of course, Mother’s people were every bit as nice as Father’s,” wrote Rebecca Yancey Williams. “But Mother’s father was from Winchester. . . . I do know that my mother was always apologetic because her father had not been born in Lynchburg.”

If Rosa Faulkner Yancey was apologetic because her father was not born in Lynchburg, what must we think of Hill City historians who *themselves* were not born here? I am here to inform you that nowadays there are such people. In 1997, two significant books of Lynchburg history appeared—both written by Yankees. One of these Yankees is Steven Elliott Tripp, whose book is titled *Yankee Town, Southern City* and subtitled *Race and Class Relations in Civil War Lynchburg*. Even though it is an insightful, well-written, and well-documented account of the period, the fact remains that Dr. Tripp doesn’t even live here. The other Yankee author, Darrell Laurant, is, I believe, familiar to you, although you may not have read his *A City Unto Itself: Lynchburg, Virginia, in the Twentieth Century*.

Darrell calls *A City Unto Itself* “a book about Lynchburg history not a Lynchburg history book” because its format is thematic rather than chronological. It’s an interesting approach, and I think he makes it work. Darrell quotes a citizen who moved here during “The Second Yankee Invasion” that followed World War II as having been told that he would have to live in Lynchburg twenty years before being

accepted. Since Darrell arrived in the Burg in 1977, I think he took that admonition seriously and waited until he could meet the residency requirement before publishing his book.

“Why is he telling me all this, and where is this paper leading?” you may be asking yourself by now. I must confess it is a circuitous way of letting you know that two years from now I too will have completed my first two decades in Lynchburg. As soon after that as possible, I plan to publish a history of our fair city’s first two hundred years. Unlike Darrell’s book, mine will be a chronological history with a prolog which explains why everyone who was in Lynchburg was there in 1786, when John Lynch received his city charter. My final chapter will close at our bicentennial celebration in October 1986 with Mayor Jimmie Bryan proclaiming, “It’s great to be alive and living in Lynchburg, Virginia.”

I can tell you my greatest challenge has been deciding what to leave out of a book that will contain 200 years of Hill City history in about 400 pages, minus about a hundred pages devoted to illustrations and notes. Since neither my father nor I were born in Lynchburg, I have also worried about establishing credibility with my readers, for I suspect, whether they be few or many, like *Lynch’s Ferry* magazine, half of them will be residents of the 24503 ZIP code.

As I got deep into my initial research, a panacea for my credibility problem became apparent: let Lynchburg citizens *themselves* tell the history of their city, whenever possible. For the past two centuries, Lynchburg has been home to some highly articulate people—many have been gifted writers as well. This evening I will give you a short history of our city from its founding up to the beginning of the Civil War by introducing you to some of my favorite Burgers in their own words. These excerpts from their writings are in most cases considerably abbreviated. Nevertheless, I have made an honest effort to accurately convey the substance of what they had to say.

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Our city’s founder, John Lynch (1740-1820), remains a shadowy figure in most of our local histories, but for me he is a fascinating one. Contemporary accounts of Lynch are few. One of these, containing the only known description of Lynch’s appearance—there are no portraits—was given by Miss Louisa Davis, a Lynchburger who was born in 1794 and who as a young woman would have recalled Lynch in his later years:

John Lynch as he is remembered near the commencement of the present [i.e., the nineteenth] century. . . was quite tall, and . . . remarkably erect. His hair was gray, his face clean shaven, and his complexion fair, as was to have been expected from his Irish extraction. In religion he was a Friend [i. e., a Quaker] of the straitest sect—wore the drab-colored dress and the white, broad-brimmed

hat, and spoke the plain language characteristic of the members of that society. His piety and benevolence were proverbial. . . . He owned a large number of slaves, but set them free when the Society of Friends determined to liberate their slaves. John Lynch in his private life was generous and hospitable and charitable to the poor. . . .

I cannot resist mentioning that the John Lynch impersonator brought here for our bicentennial was short instead of tall, of dark complexion instead of fair, and sported a beard rather than being clean shaven. To the best of my knowledge, nobody noticed.

John Lynch may have been the founder of Lynchburg and an elder in the Quakers' South River Meeting, located on the site of today's Quaker Memorial Presbyterian Church, but like any of its members, he was subject to the Meeting's discipline. Lynch, who was said to have carried on a life-long struggle to control his temper, was censured by the Meeting on at least two occasions and in one instance had to submit a letter of contrition to be reinstated.

As the city John Lynch founded grew, the South River Meeting increasingly lost members. Over the years, many Quakers migrated to free states because, since they were forbidden to own or hire slaves, they could not compete in Lynchburg's tobacco economy. The Meeting also excommunicated—or in their terminology “disowned”—other members, not only for owning or working slaves but for such offenses as marrying out of meeting, joining the Masons, taking solemn oaths, fighting, and cursing. One of those who was disowned was John Lynch's son, Dr. John C. Lynch, a slave owner. In 1810, Dr. Lynch was poisoned by his slave Bob, and died. Bob was tried for murder, but because the jury's verdict was not unanimous, was acquitted. After the trial, the elder John Lynch emancipated Bob. The record states:

November 9, 1810. Having a Negro slave named Bob, aged thirty years, fallen under my care by descent from my son, who died intestate, and being fully persuaded that freedom and liberty is the natural law of mankind and no law, moral or divine, hath given me a right to property in the person of any of my fellow creatures, and notwithstanding the injury done to me and mine by Bob, from his confession and evident circumstances for which he was tried and acquitted by the laws of his country, believing as I do that no circumstances whatever can change the principle, and leaving the event unto Him who hath said “Vengeance is mine and I will repay,” I therefore for myself and heirs hereby emancipate Bob.

(Signed) John Lynch, Edward Lynch

John Lynch's son Edward, who also signed the emancipation decree, migrated to Ohio in 1834, where, still a practicing Quaker, he died thirty years later.

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From the beginning, Lynchburg was “Tobacco Town” and remained so during most of the nineteenth century. On November 22, 1860, at the height of its tobacco prosperity, this editorial appeared in *The Lynchburg Virginian*. It was probably written by *The Virginian's* editor, Charles W. Button:

We are no indulger in the bad but comfortable habit of chewing tobacco—a habit which, by the way, fosters and causes to flourish a staple of American industry and Lynchburg enterprise. We do not mean to say that it is not a bad habit because a man enjoys himself while practicing it, nor that it is a bad habit because he is obliged to “expectorate the consequences” thereof. The American people chew, and if it is a bad habit, it is their business. . . .

We are free men, and it is one of our inalienable franchises to expectorate. Lynchburgers especially are to indulge in this nationalism. They are in the very midst of the weed upon which the habit subsists; it is their living, their meat and their drink. Therefore, despite the growlings of crusty English critics, let us all expectorate to our heart’s content, without fear, favor, or affectation.

With so much expectorating taking place in the Hill City, it is not surprising that cuspidors were to be found, as one visitor noted in 1865, “in the pews of the most fashionable church of Lynchburg.” This may have been Court Street Methodist, for according to Al Chambers’ architectural history of Lynchburg, the church was so equipped.

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For the first forty years of the nineteenth century, before the canal or railroads, roads in Virginia were abysmal and often impassable. The James River was the highway for getting tobacco from Lynchburg to Richmond and world markets. By the early nineteenth century, the standard boat for shipping tobacco and other goods had become the flat-bottomed *batteaux*. In 1830, there were said to be 1,500 of them operating between the Hill City and Richmond.

Lynchburg native Dr. George W. Bagby, who at one time was successor to Edgar Allen Poe as editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, was born in 1828. He remembered the final years of the James River *batteaux* era, and after the Civil War wrote this nostalgic reminiscence about them:

For if ever man gloried in his calling—the Negro batteauman was that man. His was a hardy calling, demanding skill, courage, and strength in a high degree. I can see him now, striding the plank that ran along the gunwale to afford him footing, his long iron-shod pole trailing in the water behind him. Now he turns,

and after two ineffectual efforts to get his pole fixed in the rocky bottom of the river, secures his purchase, adjusts the upper part of the pole to the pad at his shoulder, bends to his task, and the long, but not ungraceful bark mounts the rapids like a seabird breasting the storm. His companion on the other side plies the pole with equal ardor, and between the two, the boat bravely surmounts every obstacle, be it rocks, rapids, quicksands, hammocks, and what not. A third Negro at the stern held the mighty oar that served as a rudder. A stalwart, jolly, courageous set they were, ply the pole all day, hauling in to shore at night under the friendly shade of a mighty sycamore, to rest, to eat, to play the banjo, and to snatch a few hours of profound, blissful, sleep.

Every account of the period indicates that all, or almost all the *batteaux* men were blacks—mostly free blacks, possibly some of them were slaves. But you would never guess that by attending today's James River *Batteaux* Festival.

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The two-legged stool of Lynchburg's tobacco economy, indeed the entire economy of the pre-Civil War South was dependent on what southerners called "the peculiar institution." In 1781, Thomas Jefferson, who because of his residence at Poplar Forest may be considered a Burger, wrote in his *Notes on Virginia*:

The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the [one] part and degrading submission on the other.

Even though the majority of white Virginians would not have publicly agreed with this proposition in 1781, a few had the courage to do so. By the eve of the Civil War, however, slavery was no longer thought of as a "necessary evil" but as a "positive good." The prevailing sentiment, as expressed in a *Lynchburg Virginian* editorial, which appeared on April 7, 1860 was:

There is no class or population on earth so well satisfied, so comfortable, so contented or happy as the slaves of the South.

I have titled the chapter on slavery in my history "Lynchburg's Peculiar 'Peculiar Institution'" because bondage in the Hill City was different from and generally much less brutal than plantation slavery. "A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation," asserted the black abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass. In the years just before the Civil War, slaves in Lynchburg's tobacco factories were often allowed to live largely unsupervised except when at work, choose their employers, and receive bonuses. On payday, it sometimes turned out, they could boast that they had pocketed as much as their owners received for their hire.

But no matter how rewarding their jobs, slaves were still not free and could be sold at the whim of their owners. Seth Woodruff was the Lynchburg slave trader whose career seems to have been the longest and most profitable. He was also highly enough regarded by his fellow citizens to serve on the city council during the Civil War years. Woodruff started in the business of buying and selling human beings during 1840s. By 1852 he had built a brick building on Commerce Street near Ninth, where he would, as his advertisements announced, “board Negroes sent to Lynchburg for sale or otherwise on moderate terms, as if they were placed in the jail of the corporation.”

Seth Woodruff’s “slave pen,” as it was called, was little more than a block from the site at Main and Ninth Street where Lynchburg’s slave auctions took place. Robert Williams was himself a slave when he attended one of them. Years later he recalled the experience to an interviewer who transcribed Williams’ testimony in his dialect:

I seen dem slaves on de block down on Ninth Street in Lynchburg . Dey used to give us a pass to come to town on Saturday some time, an’ dat is how I got to see de sale. De block was a big rock dat slaves would stand on so dey would be up over de crowd. De seller would cry bids just like dey sell tobacco: “\$150, who will make it \$160, an’ so on. Some of de bids would start as high as \$400, ‘cordin’ to de condition of de person. . . .De young women would bring good money such as \$1,000 or more ‘cause dey could have plenty chillun an’ dat was whar de profit would come in. . . . An’ sometime when ole auctioneer is cryin’ off a mother, she would call to dose dat was lookin’ on, “Buy my chillun, master!” She tryin’ to fix it so dat dey will all be togeder. Sometime ole Marster would say, “I don’ wan’ yo’ chillun.” Den de mother would give such a pitiful cry an’ hollerin.

Robert Williams concluded his statement by exclaiming to his interviewer, “Lord, Lord, chile, I don’t like to recollec’ dose days.” The interview took place in 1937 when Williams was ninety-four. The accuracy of his recollections does not seem to have been compromised by exaggeration or the passage of time. The broad outlines of Williams’ story have been independently confirmed by a white contemporary, John B. Douglas, a year younger than Williams, who wrote down similar remembrances of the Lynchburg slave auctions at the beginning of the twentieth century when he was in his fifties and a resident of Pennsylvania.

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Hill City historians with a sense of humor have long delighted in quoting Lorenzo Dow—“a very eccentric preacher,” according to Lynchburg’s late-nineteenth-century historian, W. Asbury Christian, author of *Lynchburg and Its People*, who was himself a Methodist minister. The evangelist Dow wrote in his journal for 1804: “Hence I went circuitously to Lynchburg, where I spoke in what I conceived to be the seat of Satan’s Kingdom. Lynchburg was a deadly place for the worship of God.”

Perhaps Dow had a point, for at the time, almost twenty years after its founding, there was not a single church to be found in Lynchburg. The nearest one was the Quaker Meeting House, five miles outside the city limits. At the time of Dow's appearance, local Methodists had already been meeting in the Mason's Hall at the west corner of Church and Ninth Streets. Doubtless taking advantage of at least some of Dow's fifty Hill City converts, the Methodists put up a building of their own on Church Street in 1807 and held a monopoly on churchgoing in Lynchburg until 1815, when both Presbyterians and Baptists organized congregations.

In 1822, St. Paul's Episcopal Church was founded and, like the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists before them, began holding services in the Mason's Hall. In May 1826, St. Paul's dedicated a new building at the south corner of Church and Seventh Streets, and in November of the same year, a pipe organ was installed. "Some thought it a very questionable proceeding," reported Rev. Christian.

Nothing before had been seen like it in Lynchburg. . . . Sentiment was greatly divided, some holding that the use of an organ in religious services was sacrilegious, and that they would absent themselves from any church that was guilty of this sin; others held that God could be praised by the use of an instrument as well as the human voice, and they rejoiced in the new music. The agitation brought many to church to hear the "new machine."

The march of Protestantism in Lynchburg had begun: "The summer [of 1828] was notable for the extensive revivals in all the churches of Lynchburg," wrote Rev. Christian.

Great harmony prevailed and the pastors. . . worked together, helping each other as far as possible. Many united with the different churches, and great activity was started in church work.

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In 1831, three years after the religious fervor had swept through Lynchburg, twenty-six-year-old Jesse Burton Harrison, son of Samuel Harrison, one the city's leading citizens returned home from a two-year tour of Europe. Young Harrison was, both through his father and his own remarkable intellectual achievements, extremely well connected. He was close to Thomas Jefferson and visited him at Poplar Forest and Monticello, he knew James Madison, he was a cousin on his mother's side to Henry Clay, and he held a law degree from Harvard. During his sojourn in Europe, Harrison had gained entrée into the salons of Paris, and his Harvard references opened doors for him among German intellectuals and the nobility. Harrison even had a private interview with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the German novelist, poet, dramatist, scientist, and philosopher.

In a letter to a German friend dated September 1, 1831, Harrison described the Hill City as he found it upon his return:

At last behold me at home. My native town, Lynchburg, was when I left it a pleasant little place, remarkable for the picturesque character of its hilly situation, with 5000 inhabitants chiefly occupied in the commerce of tobacco, but possessing a circle of refined people disposed to contribute in every way to the social gratification of its members. I might have hoped to enjoy here a quiet and subdued kind of pleasure after my long wanderings, but I find a prodigious revolution. I will describe it to you, for it is one of the characteristics of America at present. The whole town with scarce any exception is overrun with a fanatical religious spirit that employs all thoughts, interrupts all business, forbids all social parties, and treats dancing as the greatest of crimes. . . and in fact is such a [fanaticism] which leaves the English Evangelicals a thousand leagues behind. Could you see for a moment an American religious newspaper, you would be amazed at the symptoms there displayed of an age of barbarism rushing in upon us—an inroad of holy Vandals.

Jesse Burton Harrison's education and travels had obviously rendered him too cosmopolitan to remain a contented young Burger—a phenomenon not unknown today. Not surprisingly, he became part of the great migration out of Virginia to points south and west that took place during the first half of the nineteenth century and peaked during the 1830s. The young francophile's choice of a city in which to reinvent himself was, not surprisingly, New Orleans. There he prospered, married a woman from a Virginia family, and became an influential national member of the Whig party. Further success seemed almost inevitable, but on January 8, 1841, at age thirty-five, Harrison died of yellow fever—a tragically abrupt termination of the life of one of the most brilliant men ever born in Lynchburg.

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Whether or not one considers the religious fervor that flowered in Lynchburg during the late 1820s to have been a good thing, progress was being made in other areas. From the beginning, the Hill City had struggled with its water supply. In 1827, Mayor John Victor led an initiative to bring Albert Stein of Philadelphia, one of the country's leading civil engineers, to town to assess the situation. Stein proposed damming part of the James River, channeling the water through a canal to a forcing pump at the foot of Seventh Street, and pumping the water through pipes up the hill to a reservoir at Seventh and Clay Streets. From this reservoir, the water would flow by gravity to the town below. The system's cost, however, would be \$40,000, an astronomical sum for the time, which would have to be borrowed. In June an authorizing ordinance was passed, but not without considerable grumbling over the expense. "The opponents said it was doomed to failure—nothing could come it," wrote Rev. Christian.

They were bitter in their denunciation of the men who had involved the town in debt, when no good could be realized. At length the work was completed, and Saturday, July 18, 1829, was appointed the day for the trial of the machinery. The whole town was in a high state of excitement. Some friends went to John Victor and Rev. John Early [later Bishop Early, who was also a member of the Watering Committee] and advised them to leave town on that day, for there was a plan on foot to hang them if the project failed. They replied, "The water will run if the principles of science are true, and if not, we are not afraid of the hanging." Saturday evening a large crowd gathered at the reservoir and the pump was started. Great was the suspense as they waited in almost breathless stillness to see if the water would run. George Thurman, a small boy, was let down into the pipe to see if the water was coming. He said he could hear only a roaring. Again he was let down and drawn up. This time he reported dust and a current of air. The friends of the movement looked sad; they thought some error had been made in the construction and the people would be disappointed. The third time the boy was let down, but before he had gotten far, he cried, "Here she is; draw me up quick." He was quickly drawn up, and before he had gotten well out of the way the water gushed out. A long and loud shout went up from the crowd, and John Victor, John Early, and the rest of the watering committee were the heroes of the hour, and it is said that many of the citizens got drunk drinking the health of each other with James River water.

Mayor John Victor's system remained in use almost eighty years until Lynchburg began to receive a much purer supply of water in 1907 from the Pedlar River in Amherst County.

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Perhaps the largest crowd, if not longest procession, ever to assemble in the history of Lynchburg came together on August 18, 1830, for what appears to have been the Hill City's first—but not last—public hanging. John M. Jones had quarreled with George M. Hamilton over "a woman of bad repute," Hamilton had slapped her, and Jones and Hamilton got into a fight. The fight was broken up, but Jones took himself to a Main Street store, procured a gun, found Hamilton, and killed him. Jones was found guilty of murder in the first degree and sentenced to be hanged by Judge William Daniel. Richard Toler, editor of *The Lynchburg Virginian* was present at the execution. His report is given here in a much-abbreviated version:

At a very early hour in the morning, the crowd began to assemble. . . . At length the "tiptoe curiosity" of the immense multitude was gratified. Preceded by the officers of justice and followed by the ministers of our Holy Religion, the prisoner came forth, handsomely dressed in a suit of blue broadcloth. His countenance betrayed no symptom of fear or anxiety; but was as calm and unruffled as though he had been released from his dungeon only to be re-united

to his friends and society. . . . [Jones], having ascended the cart and taken his seat, the procession (preceded by Capt. Norvell's company of artillery and Capt. Ayres' company of Rifle Grays) moved forward to the place of execution. Here, also, a vast crowd had collected, and it was with some difficulty that wedged mass could be broken, so as to open a passage to the gallows. . . .

About half after one o'clock, the Rev. Mr. Callaway commenced the religious services usual on such occasions by singing and praying, and afterwards, in compliance with a special request of the prisoner, he preached an animated, feeling, and appropriate sermon. He was followed by Dr. Holcombe in a pathetic exhortation, which drew tears from many eyes. . . . His exhortation was followed by singing a hymn and by an earnest prayer to the Throne of Grace in behalf, not only of him who stood on the threshold of eternity. . . but also of the crowd of spectators, who stood around gazing with some indifference, others with heartless levity, but the great majority with evident interest in the thrilling scene before them. . . About three o'clock, [Jones] signified to the Town Sergeant his readiness for the last act of the affecting tragedy. . . . Everything being now ready, the drop fell—and the rope broke! . . . After a few moments, Jones was again raised on his feet. A chair was handed to him, in which he sat down, drew the cap from his face, (not a muscle of which, nor even its color was changed), and asked for a drink of water, which, having drunk, the rope was again adjusted; and although his feet and hands were tied, he re-ascended the scaffold with very little assistance. A minute more elapsed—the drop fell—and Jones ceased to exist.

Editor Toler's concluding observations on what he had witnessed would surely place him among the most enlightened persons of his day or, for that matter, ours:

We again express our decided conviction that the penalty of death . . . ought not to be inflicted in this enlightened age. . . . As punishment of the criminal, it carries less terror with it than imprisonment for life; while, as a warning to others, it is worse than worthless. But if blood must be shed for blood, let it be done in the solitude of the prison. Collect no such crowds together as we saw here on Monday last, and as are seen wherever there is to be an execution. . . . The number of persons at the gallows has been variously estimated. We think there were about 8,000 persons present—others estimate as low as 4,000, and others as high as 15,000. It is not very material which is right. All will agree, however, that there were enough to create sentiments of unmingled disgust—here females leading by the hand their offspring of tender years—and there spectacles of brutal intemperance, the very vice against which the execution of Jones had warned those who beheld it with trumpet tongue, but which, as in all similar cases, they heard not—or hearing, disregarded.

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In 1840 the first division of the James River and Kanawha Canal was completed from Richmond to Lynchburg. The first freight boats arrived on December 3rd with much fanfare. The boats, reported *The Virginian*, were “greeted by the hearty cheers of a large assembly of our citizens.” Volunteer militia companies turned out, “splendidly equipped; and the drum, the musket and the cannon, joined with the loud huzzahs of the multitude, made the cliffs on the opposite side of the river re-echo the sounds of triumph.” Charles L. Mosby, a respected Hill City attorney, held, at the time, the unofficial position of town orator. Mr. Mosby stepped on board the just-arrived freight boat *William Henry Harrison*, presented a stand of colors to the helmsman, and proceeded to deliver his speech. This is Rev. Christian’s classic account of what happened next:

When near the close [of his speech, Mr. Mosby] grew eloquent. “What was land here worth before the canal was started?” said the speaker; then with a great gesture he said, “What is it worth--,” and before he finished the sentence, he was lost to view. Not being used to canal boats and having an insecure position, he lost his balance and plunged into the water. This created quite a stir. Many came to the rescue, and soon Mr. Mosby was gotten out without further injury than a good ducking. As he came out, dripping with water, James Dolan, a leading Irish citizen and acquaintance of the speaker, cried out, “Neighbor, you have changed your religion—quit the Presbyterians and turned Baptist.”

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In the 1870s, railroads and flooding at last forced the canal out of business. Intended to link Virginia with the Ohio River, it had been an expensive, if picturesque, failure. Dr. George W. Bagby, in his famous essay, “Canal Reminiscences,” remembered his journeys as a boy as a passenger on the canal packet boats:

For purposes of through travel [from Richmond to Lynchburg], the canal lasted only ten or a dozen years. And now the canal, after a fair and costly trial, is to give place to the rail, and I, in common with the great body of Virginians, am heartily glad of it. It has served its purpose well enough, perhaps, for its day and generation. The world has passed by it, as it has passed by slavery. Henceforth Virginia must prove her metal in the front of steam, electricity, and possibly mightier forces still. . . . So [the canal] must go. Well, let it go. It knew Virginia in its palmy days and it crushed the stage coach. Isn't that glory enough? I think it is. But I can't help feeling sorry for the bullfrogs; there must be a good many of them between here and Lexington. What will become of them, I wonder? They will follow their predecessors, the batteaux; and their pale, green ghosts, seated on the prows of shadowy barges, will be heard piping the roundelays of long-departed joys.

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During the closing years of the 1850s, unionist sentiment remained strong in Virginia, and particularly in Lynchburg. Charles W. Button, who became editor of *The Virginian* in 1857, saw to it that the paper's motto remained "The rights of the States and the Union of the States." Most Lynchburgers wanted desperately to remain in the Union. Lynchburg, a busy and phenomenally prosperous small city, had little to gain and much to lose in a sectional conflict. In 1859, it was rated in per capita wealth second only to New Bedford, Massachusetts, grown rich in the whaling industry.

In that same year, Susan Leigh Colston Blackford was a young housewife, only recently married to attorney Charles M. Blackford and living in the Lynchburg suburb of Diamond Hill. Their literate and deeply felt *Memoirs in and out of the Army of Virginia during the War Between the States* has been an invaluable resource to subsequent Lynchburg historians. Mrs. Blackford wrote:

On the evening of Monday, October 17, 1859, my husband's birthday (he was twenty-six), he came home with the startling news that an armed band of abolitionists, under the lead of John Brown of Kansas, had taken possession of Harper's Ferry, Virginia, and of the United States arsenal at that place with its arms, and were making proclamation of freedom to the slaves of Virginia; that a fight had been going on that day in the streets of the town, and that the mayor and a number of other good citizens had been killed and others taken prisoner. The news startled us much, and we felt that a gloom had settled over our lives.

In less than two weeks after the John Brown raid, the Lynchburg Home Guard under Captain Samuel Garland, Jr., and the Wise Troop, a cavalry company under Captain Richard Radford, were organized. Three days before John Brown was hanged on December 2, 1859, there was a public meeting in Lynchburg at Martin's Tobacco Warehouse. The city's leading citizens were not prepared to recommend cooperation with the states of the Deep South, which were bent on secession. However, they did agree to the arming of their community and the state. Of the seven resolutions passed by those assembled, the first was:

That our system of domestic slavery, recognized by the laws of God and guaranteed by the State and Federal constitutions is an institution vitally connected with the welfare of the Southern States, and that all interference with it. . . violates the pledged fate of the country and only promotes evil.

Lynchburg's economy continued to prosper throughout 1860 until the November presidential election. With Lincoln's national triumph among a divided electorate confirmed, *The Virginian* cautioned in its November ninth editorial page, "Let us rather pour oil upon the troubled waters," and noted condescendingly that "Poor little South Carolina, it seems, has resolved upon revolution." On December twentieth, the Palmetto State withdrew from the Union.

Soon after the election, Lynchburg's economy began to show signs of instability. "Business is dull, money scarce, and the times sadly out of joint," mourned *The Virginian* in January 1861. Six days later, it complained, "Men are looking to the future with fearful forebodings," and reported that already a record number of Lynchburgers "were destitute of the common necessities of life."

"One would suppose . . . that the voice of gaiety would have been silenced and that gloom would have shrouded the social life of a people over whom hung the pall of so uncertain a future," wrote Mrs. Blackford, "but strange to say such was not the case, and our people sought relief from the oppression of their forebodings in social dissipation and reckless gaiety."

The acknowledged leaders of Lynchburg's social frenzy during the winter of 1860-61 were Captain and Mrs. Samuel Garland Jr. Ironically, the Garlands used as a pretext for staging their extravagant entertainments the presence in their household of visitors from New York. Mrs. Blackford, undoubtedly recalling that the both the future General Garland and his wife would not survive the war, concluded her recollection of the winter 1860-61 season poignantly: "Thus that last winter of peace, that last winter of life to so many, passed away."

At 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861, a Virginian, Edmund Ruffin, pulled the lanyard on the secessionist cannon which sent the first shell from Charleston's Battery across the bay into the Federal garrison at Fort Sumpter. Virginia rushed a delegation to Washington to confer with President Lincoln the next day in a desperate effort to ward off armed hostilities, while Fort Sumpter surrendered.

On April fifteenth, the President issued a call for 75,000 volunteers from all the states to put down the rebellion in South Carolina. Virginia would not comply, and two days later, by a vote of eighty-five to fifty-five, Virginia voted to secede. "We shudder at the thought of what lies before us," commented *The Virginian* with prescience, "while we deprecate the course that has been taken by both sides."

Captain Richard Radford's Wise Troop was quickly expanded through local recruitment into a full regiment, the Second Virginia Cavalry. It trained in Lynchburg throughout May, and on the morning of June third, left for Northern Virginia. Lieutenant (later Captain) Charles M. Blackford, who was a member of the Wise Troop, recalled:

Hundreds of people came down to the bank of the river to bid us goodbye The [wooden] bridge was not considered safe for so many horsemen to cross at one time. . . . At ten o'clock Captain Terry gave orders to move and we plunged into the river amidst the cheers of the men and the tears of the women upon the bank. . . . From the top of the hill on the opposite side, I stopped to take a long farewell of my home. I could see the whole town stretched out before me.

Diamond Hill, my own house, and even my chamber window, where I knew my wife and little ones were sitting and straining their tearful eyes to catch the last sorrowing look at the squadron as it crossed the ridge. I could linger only a moment, and then, dashing away the resistless tear and choking down my swelling heart, I applied myself to my many duties as my only comfort.

At the same time, Mrs. Blackford remembered, "I knew the host were gathering for a great battle, I knew my husband would be in it, and under such circumstances any wife would believe, as I did, that he would surely be killed. What wonder, then, that I should have writhed in spirit."

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And so it is here, at the beginning of the Civil War, that I must, for now, end my Hill City history by "Burgers in Their Own Words." You all know how the war turned out and most of you are aware that Lynchburg sustained no serious physical damage from the war. Although Charles and Susan Blackford suffered the loss of three young children during the war years and were almost penniless when the war ended, Captain Blackford through talent and hard work quickly revived his family's fortunes. Long before he died in 1903, he was a successful corporate attorney and businessman, much in demand as a speaker and writer, and one of Lynchburg's most respected citizens.

In conclusion, I respectfully suggest that to discover what took place in Lynchburg between 1861 and 1986, you acquire a copy of my history when it appears two or three years from now. Thank you.