

The ALEXANDRIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

VOLUME XXIX NUMBER 1 NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2009

SEPTEMBER MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, September 23, 2009

PLACE: The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia

TIME: 7:30 PM

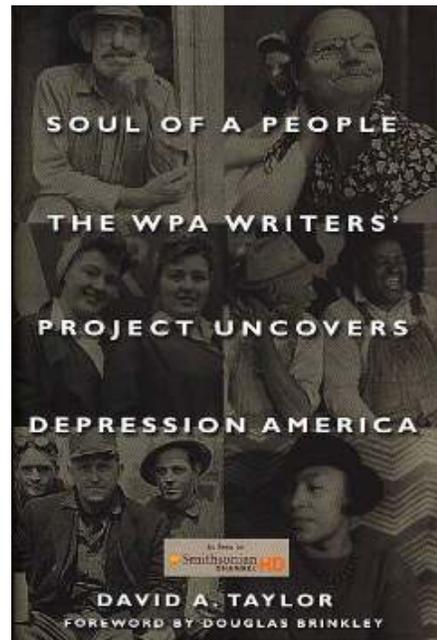
SPEAKER: David A. Taylor, Author

The WPA Writers' Project in Virginia

Old Town resident David A. Taylor, the author of *Soul of a People: The WPA Writers' Project Uncovers Depression America*, will discuss "The WPA Writers' Project in Virginia," and talk about the process of making the 1930s Virginia guidebook and some of the surprises you find there.

In the Great Depression, the WPA Writers' Project was one small part of FDR's New Deal, designed to put people back to work. The Writers' Project recruited nearly 7,000 people nationwide and assigned unemployed workers to research their communities and interview people about local history, and produced a series of unusual state guidebooks now known as the WPA Guides. Across the country, the WPA gave a first start for later-famous authors such as John Cheever, Ralph Ellison, Louis L'Amour, Zora Neale Hurston, and Eudora Welty. In Virginia, the Project tapped Douglass Southall Freeman, who contributed to the WPA guide to Virginia. The WPA writers produced a remarkable set of life history accounts, helped to launch the current interest in oral history, and published an important account of African-American history in the Commonwealth. This talk will look at their experiences and their legacy now.

David Taylor's latest book, *Soul of a People*, and a Smithsonian Channel HD special of the same title, are based on an article that he wrote for *(Continued on Page 2)*



About Our September 23 Speaker. *(Continued from Page 1)* the *Smithsonian* magazine. He writes for the *Washington Post*, the *Village Voice*, and other publications, as well as scripts for television documentaries. His work has aired on the Discovery Channel, the Learning Channel, and elsewhere. He last spoke to the Alexandria Historical Society in March 2007 on “Virginia and the China Trade” based on his book *Ginseng, the Divine Root: The Curious History of the Plant that Captivated the World*.

Civil War Sesquicentennial Meeting. A second Civil War Sesquicentennial Meeting will be held on Saturday, August 29, from 9:00 AM to noon at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, 101 Callahan Drive. A speaker from the Virginia Tourism Corporation will facilitate sessions to plan programs for Alexandria’s commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. This meeting is open to all, and public participation is most welcome. Those planning to participate are requested to confirm their attendance by calling the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association at 703-746-3298 so that staff can make proper meeting room arrangements.

51st Annual Alexandria Forum. The 51st annual Alexandria Forum will explore “Rediscovering the Federal City. It will open on Friday, September 25 with a keynote address by Sumpter Priddy and dinner at Gadsby’s Tavern Museum from 6:30 PM until 9:00 PM. The Forum will continue on Saturday, September 26 with a series of three lectures in the morning at the Lyceum, followed by tours of Decatur House and Dumbarton in the afternoon. Lunch and transportation for the house tours is included. The cost is \$175 for all the Friday and Saturday events, \$125 for Friday evening only, or \$100 for only the Saturday events. For more information or tickets, call the Office of Historic Alexandria at 703-838-4554 or visit www.historicalexandria.org.

Eighteenth Century Fashion Show. Enjoy an afternoon of high fashion—eighteenth century style—on Sunday, September 20 at 3:00 PM. The Carlyle House terrace will be transformed into a runway as fashion historians and living history interpreters describe the various styles and types of clothing that models are wearing. Be a part of a discussion that covers the fast-paced changes of clothing during the lives of Carlyle House women. See the changes that shaped the reproduction of the gowns worn by Sarah Fairfax Carlyle and Sarah Carlyle Herbert. The cost is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children. Reservations are required. Call 703-549-2997.

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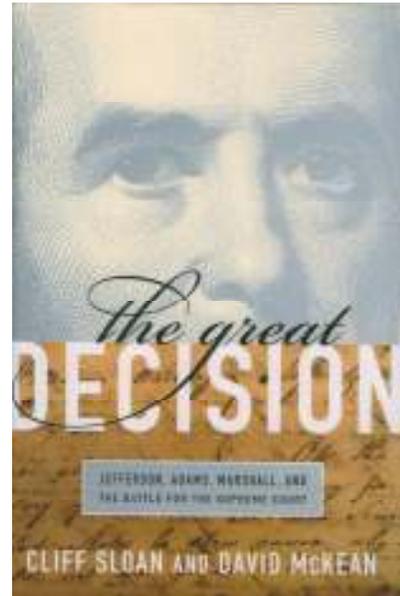
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October 28 Society Meeting (7:30 PM at the Lyceum) – “The Great Decision: Jefferson, Adams, Marshall, and the Battle for the Supreme Court” Lecture by Cliff Sloan. Cliff Sloan, the co-author of *The Great Decision: Jefferson, Adams, Marshall, and the Battle for the Supreme Court*, will tell the exciting story of *Marbury v. Madison*, probably the most important Supreme Court decision in the history of the United States. *Marbury v. Madison* established the power of the Supreme Court to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional. But it is also an Alexandria story. Three of the four plaintiffs (Dennis Ramsay, Robert Townshend Hooe, and William Harper) were Alexandrians, and the attorney for the plaintiffs (Charles Lee) was an Alexandrian. Important events leading up to the case took place in Alexandria.

More than just a court case, *Marbury v. Madison*, expounded by Chief Justice John Marshall in 1803, was the culmination of a piece of national political theater that had lasted the better part of two years and put the court squarely at odds with the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, Marshall’s detested cousin. Jefferson, his secretary of state James Madison (who never deigned to appear before the court despite his name on the case), and the newly-elected Republicans were contesting what they saw as invasive political appointments made in the last hours of the presidency of John Adams’ Federalist administration. The capital of Washington, like the country, was divided and enraptured by the public spat between the parties who has just fought America’s first contested election. Newspapers took highly partisan sides, senators insulted each other to the point of violence, and the Adams government was so near to collapse that a second revolution seemed possible.

To prevent the government of the young republic from coming apart at the seams, someone had to settle the contest ethically and fairly. John Marshall realized that he could in one ruling dismiss the merits of Jefferson’s case, strike down an act of Congress, and place the Supreme Court above the fray. Thus, Marshall established the power of the Supreme Court to be the last word on constitutionality – a stroke that dramatically enhanced the Court and laid the cornerstone of the distinctive American rule of law.

Cliff Sloan is a magna cum laude graduate of both Harvard College and Harvard Law School. In government service, he was Law Clerk to Judge J. Skelly Wright of the U.S. Court of Appeals to the District of Columbia; Law Clerk to U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, an Associate Counsel in the Office of the Independent Counsel for Iran Contra, Assistant to the Solicitor General of the United States, and an Associate Counsel to the President of the United States. A former publisher of *Slate* magazine, he currently is a partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom in Washington, DC. He has argued before the Supreme Court five times.



Interested in Serving on Our Board? We don’t know you’re interested if you don’t tell us. If you would be interested in serving on the Alexandria Historical Society Board of Directors, please call President Audrey Davis at (703) 838-4356, Ext. 11.

ALEXANDRIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. NEWSLETTER

201 SOUTH WASHINGTON STREET, ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

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The AHS Newsletter is published by the Alexandria Historical Society, Inc., and mailed free to members. To join the Society, submit your check made payable to "Alexandria Historical Society," together with your name, address, and telephone numbers, to the Alexandria Historical Society, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314. Annual dues are: \$10.00, Student; \$20.00, Single; \$30.00, Couple; \$50.00, Sustaining; and \$100.00, Patron. The membership year is July to June. Dues are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

The purpose of the Society shall be to promote an active interest in American history and particularly in the history of Alexandria and of Virginia.

The Society is organized exclusively for educational purposes.

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www.alexandriahistorical.org**

