

# BLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

### SPRING/SUMMER 2026 EDITION

#### President's Message

Welcome to another edition of Bland County Historical Society newsletter.

Our Mission has always been to preserve and share the stories, memories, and history that make Bland County special. From family records and newspaper archives to photographs and artifacts, we are proud to help keep our communities past alive for future generations. We invite everyone to visit the Historical Society, explore our collections, and become part of preserving our local heritage. Whether you are researching your family history, looking through old newspapers, or simply stopping by to learn something new, there is always something waiting to be discovered. Don't forget our giftshop contains books, shirts, hats, afghans, and so much more! Perfect gift ideas for those "hard to buy for" family members. Thank you to our members, volunteers, and supporters who continue to make this work possible. Your support helps ensure that the history of Bland County will never be forgotten.

We hope to see you soon at the old jail.

*Sincerely Yours,*  
*~Eisle Havens, President*  
276-613-4626



#### Involvement

Do you have an article or story you wish to submit to be published in our quarterly newsletter? Is there something you wish us to research? Do you want to volunteer your time to help preserve the History of Bland County? Does your student need volunteer hours for school?

We are always accepting new ideas and suggestions!

The Bland County Historical Society is OPEN every Saturday from April through December; 9am to 1 pm. However, if you need assistance and cannot visit during regular business hours we will gladly attempt to meet with you by appointment. You may contact us at 276-688-0088, please leave a message or email us at [infor@blandcountyhistsoc.org](mailto:infor@blandcountyhistsoc.org)

#### 2026 Officers

President – Eisle Havens  
Vice President – Rachel Havens  
Secretary TBA  
Treasurer – Kathy Sue Havens

#### Board Members

Mary Bowen - John Dodson – Virginia Gills –  
Tony Mitchell – Randy Newberry – Julia Stephens  
- Molly Thompson – Melinda Litton – Lorree  
Waddle– Sue Ellen Tate

Meet our new board members

Visit to historical home June 13, 2026

Membership information and application.

2026 BCHS scholarship award.

September meeting

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#### *Meet our new board members.*

At our December meeting we voted in several new members to the board. We welcome them and appreciate them volunteering their time. Most are names familiar to the Bland County community and here are some brief snapshots.

John Dodson is a retired history teacher from Rocky Gap High School where he taught history for over 30 years. He and his family moved here in 1979 from Greenville, South Carolina. In the 1990s John and his students developed an oral history program and interviewed 800 local people. These interviews were archived to be publicly available. Out of this program the Mountain Home Center was developed. John continues to have a strong civic interest and desire to make history available to the community.

Julia Stephens grew up on a dairy and beef farm in West Virginia but her great grandmother was Betty Mary Fanning farmed here in Bland County and she reports being related to the Davidsons, Shannons and Kings of Bland County. Julia has worked for the Farm Service Agency in Wytheville for 30 years. A middle school teacher sparked her interest in history as well as her family who often talked about family history and the historic home where she grew up. One of her hobbies is restoring grave stones in old cemeteries! She will be glad to share her knowledge with the group. Julia has four children all out on their own or in college.


Mary Bowen is a native of Bland County with deep roots here. Her mother's family is from Ceres and her father from Bland. She grew up on Eagle Oak Farm until age 18 and has returned recently to live and help her brother farm. She reports raising calves "on the bucket" to go to school. Mary is an RN currently working at Wytheville Community Hospital in the day surgery. Prior to this job she worked and lived in Bluefield. As a nurse she worked in critical care cardiology and interventional radiology. Like our other new members Mary says she has always been interested in history and looks forward to learning more through The Bland County Historical Society.

Tony Mitchell was born in Wytheville but like others his Bland County roots are strong. Earlier he spent nine years in the service of the U. S. Navy. Later working for 31 years for Appalachian Power Company based out of Bluefield W. V. and is currently retired. He is married to Kathryn (Kathy) Richardson and is the father of one daughter and two grandchildren Lily and Rowen. Tony comes to us with a wealth of knowledge having volunteered for many years in history and genealogy. His specialty was managing map collections and IT equipment. Like other members his interest in history, especially local history is both strong and deep.

Melinda Litton grew up in Bluefield, Virginia but when she married Tommy Litton, she moved to Bland and still lives on the family farm. She says she loves being outdoors. Melinda's mother still lives in Bluefield and is 91 years old and still a priority for Melinda. Melinda says her husband's family was very interested in Bland County and family history. Tommy Litton passed away in 2024. Being a mother to her son Luke has prompted more interest in family history.

On behalf of the members of the board, we welcome these new volunteers who are willing to step up and help us with their time and skills. The Board of Directors of The Bland County Historical Society is a board of volunteers. We have no paid staff so carrying out the mission of keeping our history available to the public is sometimes difficult and we welcome those who would like to join us. Please let others know we welcome all volunteers.

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The June 13, 2026 Meeting of The Bland County Historical Society will be held at Mountain Glen in Ceres, Virginia. The meeting will commence at 1:00 pm. Mountain Glen is the ancestral home of Misses Nita and Nell Hudson, two of Bland county's educators. This home is one of the most unique structures in Bland County. The current owners, Brad and Amie Harden, have been making repairs to the stately home, but have maintained the integrity of the structure. This house dates back to 1850 and 1860 when it was built by John Repass. Mountain Glen is completely furnished with heirlooms and furnishing that have been in keeping with the houses style and times. Some of the heirlooms that are prized are: a drop leaf dining table of cherry and a seven-piece Victorian parlor set upholstered in velvet, and beautiful pieces of China and glass handed down from several generations. The home is located off the old Rural Retreat turnpike, one and 1/2 miles south of Ceres. It is included in the National Register of Historic Places.

## WEBSTORE

Have you visited our webstore? We have over 20 items listed from our gift shop! From books to Afghans, ornament to hats, we have a nice selection to shop from the comforts of your home. We will be adding more items as time allows. More items coming soon.

<http://bcohistoricalsociety.bigcartel.com/products>

## Bland County Historical Society

The Bland County Historical Society needs Presenters for our Quarterly Membership meeting in March, June and September.

Do you know, have an interesting topic to present? Is there something specific you want to learn?

Contact us at 276-613-4626 or  
[info@blandcountyhistsoc](mailto:info@blandcountyhistsoc)

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Our efforts to continue to preserve the history of Bland County are solely funded by membership fees, donations and merchandise sales. If you have not sent in your membership renewal for 2026, we encourage you to do so. As with much of our economy our operating costs continues to rise and we have reluctantly decided to increase the yearly cost of membership. We hope this will not be a hardship and that you will continue to support us and take advantage of our Old Jail and the history it has to offer.

You may also email us at [info@blandcountyhistsoc.org](mailto:info@blandcountyhistsoc.org) for a copy or stop by the office.

Membership is \$30.00 yearly for individual, \$50.00 yearly for couples, \$10.00 yearly for students (public school age), \$50.00 yearly for organizations and \$150.00 each for a Lifetime membership.

Forms can be obtained on our website <http://blandcountyhistsoc.org/>.

We also offer gift items such as afghans, ornaments, books, t-shirts, hats, mugs and other items for sale in our gift shop.



## Bland County High School Scholarship Award

Avery Furstnau was the recipient of the Historical Society scholarship award. Avery is the Valedictorian of the 2026 graduating class. He will attend WCC then plans to transfer to a four-year university. He wishes to pursue a career in engineering. We wish him the best of luck reaching his goals.

Our September Annual Meeting topic will be the Skydusky Hollow Cave System in in Bland County. The cave is a massive complex KARST network extending over 8.6 miles. It contains the Newberry-Bane Cave, the largest and most complex cave in the system and is known biologically as a critical hibernation site for an endangered bat. Be on the lookout for dates and times to learn about this historical local novelty. For more information visit <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/vacavetrail> .