



# SOUTH MOUNTAIN TIDINGS

The Newsletter of South Mountain Heritage Society

Fall 2018

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South Mountain Heritage Society is dedicated to preserving and interpreting the history of Burkittsville, Maryland.

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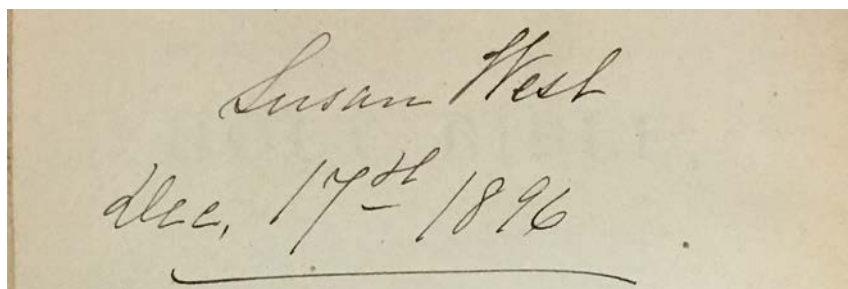
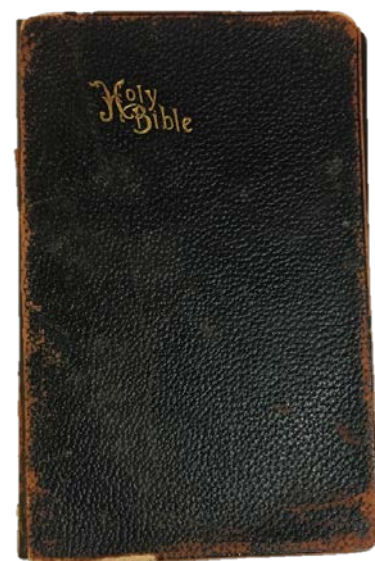
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## The Susan West Bible: An Artifact Reveals a Forgotten Narrative

Historical artifacts rarely have just one story to tell. In a museum, artifacts can be employed in numerous ways to tell diverse narratives. Our visitors this summer had the opportunity to view some of our collection presented in an exhibit which explored both their historical contexts as well as their aesthetic characteristics.

Early this year, we received a generous donation of books, some of which were acquired for the museum collection due to their history, and others which will be made available in our October book sale. One of these books, though unassuming on the outside, revealed a unique story for a member of one of the Burkittsville area's prominent families, the Wests of Petersville.

The book is an edition of the Holy Bible, published in New York sometime in the last-quarter of the nineteenth century. A smooth, flexible leather cover surrounds the Bible with simple incised and gilded lettering on the top left corner of the front cover and on the spine. Inside the cover page, a written inscription reveals the former owner of this artifact: Susan West. The inscription also provides a date, December 17, 1896, assumed to be the time when West purchased or otherwise received the Bible.





However, the discoveries to be found in this Bible didn't stop with the cover inscription. Tucked into multiple pages of the book are notes, greeting cards, and photographs collected by West. Among the items are cards with prayers and verses of scripture, quotations from poetry and literature, and newspaper clippings. There are also pieces of paper on which are recorded genealogical notes for the West family and its historical connections in Maryland history.

The Wests were among the earliest families to settle on the Merryland Tract, a historic property surveyed in 1730 which covered most of the southwestern corner of the Middletown Valley, extending from the Potomac River north to Burkittsville and from South Mountain to the Catoctin Creek in the east. The Merryland Tract was subdivided and sold in lots in the mid-1760s. Many of the historical families who rose to prominence in the Burkittsville area in the late-18<sup>th</sup> century arrived at this time, including the Lee (who established the Needwood Plantation), Garrott, Thomas, and the West families. Before coming to the colonies, the Wests lived in England and traced their ancestry back to Alfred the Great and Charlemagne. They maintained connections with their English heritage in America, becoming founding members of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Petersville.

Susan West, the former owner of the Bible, was born in Petersville on December 17, 1841 to Levin and Eliza Hilleary West, the sixth of seven children. Her family's extensive land holdings, including some of the most fertile agricultural land in Frederick County, afforded her with a comfortable childhood. All of the West Children received private education, likely in connection with the rectors (ministers) of St. Mark's Parish in Petersville, many of whom were known to either teach in schools or provide private tutoring. At the age of twenty, Susan witnessed the Civil War as it passed by her home on the turnpike road (now MD 180) in Petersville. Soldiers encamping near the West's farm, marching off to fight, and returning with wounds from the battlefield became an annual occurrence in 1862, 1863, and 1864.





A photograph of Susan West in her old age found inside the Bible. The two women with her may have been fellow nurses at Bellevue Hospital.

Perhaps inspired by the scenes she witnessed during the war, Susan pursued an education in New York, becoming a student at the first professional nursing school in the United States. She graduated from the school at Bellevue Hospital in 1873 and embarked on a career as one of the first professionally-trained nurses in the country. When reviewing the small notes in the Bible, her life in New York is revealed through her wide network of friends and acquaintances. Some of the notes may also have been from her many patients at the hospital.

Susan gained some notoriety in 1923 when she marked her fiftieth anniversary in her nursing career. A story describing her life and work was published in newspapers across the country, from New York to Miami to Salt Lake City. In the interview, Susan observed that “American nurses are wanted now in every part of the world to nurse or to open training schools...but it was not that way fifty years ago when I came to Bellevue. Then a nurse had to do a patient’s laundry...light a candle at night if the sick needed attention...and had to use carbolic acid as the only antiseptic.” In her long career, Susan witnessed not only the advances in the medical field at large, but also the role that nurses played in the profession. Susan said “the care as to detail that makes the modern hospital a lifesaving institution did not exist then. But with the coming of the trained nurse came the change.”

After serving with distinction as one of America’s first professional nurses for over half a century, Susan West retired and returned to the area, residing in Brunswick until her death on June 10, 1936 at the age of 95. She was buried alongside her parents, Levin and Eliza West, in the churchyard at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Petersville, the same church her ancestors helped to organize.

South Mountain Heritage Society is honored to have the opportunity to preserve this Bible and to share the remarkable story that its contents reveal. Through the handwritten notes, greeting cards, obituaries, and other items leaved throughout the Bible, Susan West’s devout faith, interest in her patients, and her family’s historical legacy is revealed. We plan to display the Bible and the many items found inside in a special exhibit during our Museums by Candlelight opening on Saturday, December 8, 2018 from 12:00 pm through 5:00 pm.



Susan West’s gravestone in the cemetery at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Petersville.

## Expanding our Collections and our Audience

The collections of South Mountain Heritage Society have been built over the past four decades, beginning in the mid-1970s when our predecessor, the Burkittsville District Heritage Society, was organized. While the main function of this heritage society was to administer Burkittsville's newly-registered historic district, the group also began amassing a small collection of artifacts which were stored in their headquarters, the Resurrection Reformed Church. When the Reformed congregation decided to close the church in 1979, the contents of the building, from the furnishing in the sanctuary and the pipe organ to dozens of hymn books, Bibles, and other materials from the church's 150-year history became a major part of the museum collection.

Throughout its history, South Mountain Heritage Society has made it a core function of our mission to collect and preserve the cultural resources of the Burkittsville area. Thanks to the generosity of several donors, our collections expanded greatly in the late-1990s and early-2000s to cover multiple aspects of the town's history. These artifacts, photographs, manuscripts, and audio/visual files have enabled the heritage society to develop our museum through which hundreds of visitors each year are introduced to the history of Burkittsville.

In the past few years, we have continued to grow our collections while also committing to make our resources available through the web to larger audiences. In 2013, we launched *Eyewitness Burkittsville*, our first online archive of Burkittsville's historical artifacts. This year, we have unveiled new digital exhibits and galleries on the SMHS main website ([www.southmountainheritage.org](http://www.southmountainheritage.org)). These collections include our Civil War manuscripts, artifacts from the Reformed Church, and exhibits such as "Burkittsville 1975," "Burkittsville Then and Now," and our latest addition, an exhibit on the Burkittsville Female Seminary.

These digital collections help to introduce SMHS to new and diverse audiences, including people who may never actually visit the town or the museum. Our main website receives, on average, 250-300 unique visitors each month, and our digital collections are some of the top-visited pages on the entire site. We are working on new galleries and exhibits that will further expand the resources available to visitors of the SMHS website.

### South Mountain Heritage Society

HOME ABOUT US HISTORY & RESEARCH DIGITAL COLLECTIONS EVENTS





## Two Major Preservation Projects Completed



In the spring, the exhibit room and restrooms were scraped and repainted and the gutters were cleaned and repaired. The exhibit room dates from 1896 and originally housed the Sunday School for the Reformed Church.



Over the summer, the portico was restored. This section of the historic church was built during the renovations of 1860 and is an integral element of the museum's architecture. The badly-deteriorated wood floor was pulled up, the joists braced and repaired, and a new composite floor installed. Our two Ionic columns and the balustrades were also scraped and repainted.



Your membership and donations to South Mountain Heritage Society support the ongoing preservation of the Resurrection Reformed Church, ensuring that future generations can enjoy and learn from this historic architectural landmark.

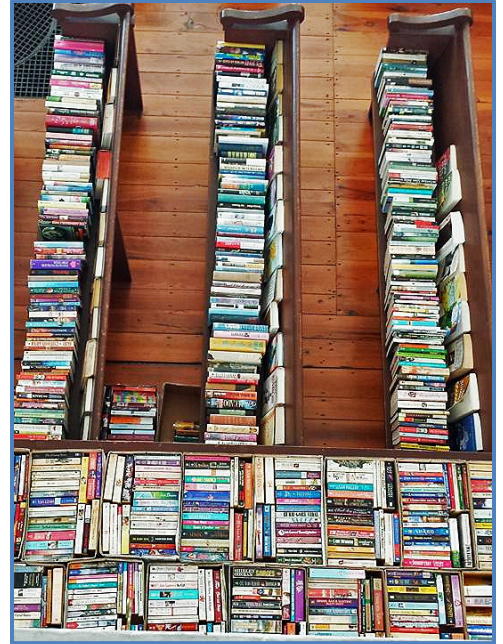


## Annual Gigantic Used-Book Sale

Every Saturday in October, 8am-4pm

Thanks to the generosity of many, SMHS has received hundreds of new books over the summer that will be on sale during our annual event in October. On the last week of the sale (October 27), we will have our “Books by the Bag” special where you can fill a paper bag (which we provide) to the brim for just \$6.00.

In order for the book sale to be successful, **we need volunteers** to help attend to customers and to organize and arrange the books. You can sign-up to help with the book sale by visiting the museum website and going to the “Events” page or by contacting Jody Brumage (240-818-1610). Volunteers can sign-up to help during the morning (8am-noon) or afternoon (noon-4pm) shifts on any of the four weeks of the sale.



## 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Spook Hill Cider & Wine 4 Mile Run

Saturday, October 20, 2018

We anticipate welcoming hundreds of participants to town for the sixth running of the Spook Hill Cider and Wine 4 Mile. This is a critical fundraiser for the Heritage Society and is spearheaded by our devoted race director, Bill Susa. Those interested in participating in the run can still register by visiting the website [www.spookhill4mile.org](http://www.spookhill4mile.org). The course takes runners throughout the Burkittsville Historic District, the Union Cemetery, and the Boordy Vineyards and Distillery Lane Ciderworks Orchard.

**We also need volunteers** to help with a variety of projects on race day. Contact Bill Susa ([spookhill4mile@gmail.com](mailto:spookhill4mile@gmail.com)) to indicate your interest and receive a job assignment.

We thank all of our corporate and private sponsors for their support of the race. We also especially thank the landowning partners, Boordy Vineyards and Distillery Lane Ciderworks, and the Burkittsville Ruritan Club for providing the use of their parking lot and pavilion for registration.

## Yuletide Artisan Market

Saturday, November 17-Sunday, November 18, 2018

On the weekend before Thanksgiving, the SMHS Museum will be transformed into a vibrant market of diverse and quality crafts made by local artisans in the annual Yuletide Artisan Market. A tradition for many years now, the market is a great opportunity to support local artisans while also getting an early-start on your holiday shopping! The Yuletide Artisan Market will run on Saturday, November 17 from 9:00 am until 4:30 pm and on Sunday, November 18 from 12:00 pm until 4:30 pm.



Also on Saturday, November 17, crafts will be on sale in St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church next door. The church will also be offering their annual Country Kitchen, with delicious local food items including country ham and oyster sandwiches, slippery pot pie, and hand-cut fries (not to mention the best apple dumplings!). The Country Kitchen is held in the Parish Hall next door to St. Paul's Church.



## Museums by Candlelight

Saturday, December 8, 2018

On Saturday, December 8, 2018, museums and historic sites throughout Frederick County will open their doors for the annual Museums by Candlelight. South Mountain Heritage Society will be open from 12:00 pm until 5:00 pm for visitors to explore the museum, trimmed with festive and traditional holiday decorations, and enjoy music on the historic Pomplitz and Rodewald Pipe Organ. Refreshments will be available and children will be invited to make a unique ornament to take home. We will also have a special display on the Susan West Bible, described in the feature article in this newsletter.

**Volunteers will be needed** to bring finger food/dessert items for our refreshment table and to pump the organ. Contact Jody Brumage (240-818-1610) if you are interested in helping!

## New Year's Eve Bell Ringing

South Mountain Heritage Society will host this year's annual community gathering on New Year's Eve. This tradition, which culminates in the pealing of the historic church bells in the towers of SMHS and St. Paul's Church, is a wonderful time to gather with friends and neighbors from town. Light refreshments are provided in the museum beginning at 11:30 pm. Folks are invited to ring the bells at St. Paul's at midnight. Come by and help us keep this tradition which dates back to the 1870s as we literally "ring-in" 2019!



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