



## Raise the Roof Campaign Completed

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The roof is completed at last!! Thanks to the excellent leadership and guidance of Jim Page over the past three years, the dream of our new roof has become a reality. The fine work of Southwest Restoration will ensure the security of the museum for many years to come. Abundant thanks to the many people whose generosity and support made possible the completion of this project. It is truly the people's museum.

During the construction process, we learned a lot about the historic house that shelters the Montgomery Museum. Southwest Resorations' Mark Clark has worked on historic brick structures in our area, including buildings built by the Deyerles, for many years. He agrees with the theory that the house was built by this famous builder family. He also told us that ours is one of the most heavily built buildings he has seen; in places the brick walls are six bricks thick. Mr. Clark and his team repaired damage to the building's significant and lovely molded brick cornice, which is now visible instead of hidden behind guttering.

The new pressed metal shingles on the roof are nearly identical to shingles that had been in place on the roof since the late 19th century. In fact, historic nails found on the rafters suggest that the new roof is probably only the third roof over the entire 161-year history of the building! The original roof was almost certainly wood shingles. Together, the work on the bricks and the roof will preserve the building for years to come.



*The museum roof was installed this fall.*



*Mark Clark, owner of Southwest Restoration, and Museum Director Sue Farrar are proud of the new roof.*

## JIMMIE BLANCHARD NEW BOARD MEMBER

Jimmie Blanchard lives in Christiansburg with his wife Emily and their two sons, Keiran and Seth. Jimmie is native of Virginia growing up in Gloucester, VA. Jimmie took an early interest in the area, and his love of history began to form.



Jimmie moved to the New River Valley to attend Virginia Tech and graduated with a Bachelor's degree from the college of Arts and Sciences. After graduation, he stayed in the area. He worked for several flooring enterprises occupying positions including sales and store management. He has lived and worked in Christiansburg for 15 years. In 2010, Jimmie opened his own store in Christiansburg called Floored. Jimmie is excited to be working with the museum.

## SHOP AT KROGER... GIVE TO THE MUSEUM

The Kroger cards made \$1,500 for the museum last year. Please continue to use and re-use your card and encourage friends to get a card and use it. If you don't have a card, please come to the museum and get one. Remember, you can use it for gas, and you still get your Kroger points!



## MUSEUM GIFT SHOP FOR CHRISTMAS & THE NEW YEAR

Visit our museum gift shop which now features art work by some of our local artists. You can purchase a 2014 calendar created with original works by Lois Stephens, small works by Marie Collier, note cards by Ruth Lefko, Ann Sinderman, and Dawnita Hall--- as well as many prints and photographs.



*Books, calendars, photos, etc. for sale*

## SHOPPING AT AMAZON

You can help the museum to earn money when you shop on Amazon. Just go to the museum website and follow the directions in the little box. We receive 5% of sales. Thanks very much!



## MEADOWBROOK MUSEUM

The original safety lock boxes from the old Bank of Shawsville are now on display in the Meadowbrook Museum. The boxes, on loan from Bill Ryan, are encased in a steel plate. The bank opened in 1907.

Thanks to Ray Epperly, we now have on display the original pump organ from the old White Memorial Methodist Church. The museum has undertaken a project to restore it to a like new status. In a few months, a recital by a local organist will be scheduled. We all look forward to hearing old hymns just like our ancestors did before electricity was discovered.

For many years, especially at the turn of the century, stereoscopic viewers provided a source of education and entertainment. These viewers created the perception of depth from two dimensional images. Local photo shops sold stock pictures from all over the world. Come in and look at the one we have on display, from George Gray. This one preceded the View-Master, introduced in 1962.



*Original Bank of Shawsville safety boxes from 1907  
(on loan from Bill Ryan)*



*Stereoscopic Viewer  
(on loan from George Gray)*



*Original White Memorial Methodist Church Organ  
(on loan from Ray Epperly)*

Meadobrook Museum  
P. O. Box 426  
Shawsville, VA 24162  
540 268-5047  
berrypatch12@verizon.net

# The “What’s Your Story?” Project by Davina Irvin

All generations communicate differently. The Babyboomers have their style, Generation X and Y have their style and the Millennials have their style. With technology rapidly changing, the way we communicate also changes. “What’s Your Story?” (with the acronym WYS?) is a multi-generational community learning project created by Rita and Davina Irvin of Definite Directions, Inc. It brings together individuals and organizations to create shared experiences that utilize multimedia, social media and events. The goal is to bring local history to life.

Over the next few months, we are asking for support from the museum and other community organizations, as we focus on African American history. The project will seek to understand the goals and achievements of Christiansburg Institute in the 19th and 20th century.

Although African American history month is in February, if you are African American, there’s more. It’s your life every single day of the year. It encompasses what happened before you were born and will continue well after you’re gone. Regardless of our ethnicity, our history shapes who we are and helps to define where we are as a community. History demonstrates that even when the time and place are the same, people’s perspectives vary greatly. WYS? gives a voice to those perspectives.

As natives of the area, it’s up to us to discuss and share our experiences. When people stop talking, things stop happening. Two concepts from WYS? are:

- Put the “T” in History
- Pictures Worth 1,000 Words

Rita and Davina have been working with the CHS Black Student Awareness Club to create visual displays for the museum with the concept of High School then and now to reflect upon their personal history and that of Christiansburg Institute.

Prior to WYS?, the students didn’t know a lot about the school. They didn’t understand that our current high school property is located on part of what used to be the campus of Christiansburg Institute. They didn’t know that their ancestors attended the school. Now, they no longer view the Edgar A. Long Building as just a rundown, boarded up old structure. They know about it and now they have questions. The process for finding those answers has begun.

Students are using the internet to help in their research about their heritage. They understand that exploring the past will help them share the story and provide the tools to shape the future. They are excited about coming to the museum to view their



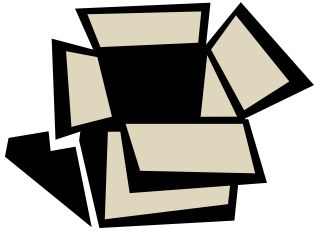
*CHS students are looking online for information on the old Christiansburg Institute*

displays. For some of them, it will be their first time there. Our goal is to make sure it’s not their last.

Although the WYS? exhibit features Christiansburg Institute this time around, we look forward to featuring the museum and other local historical treasures in the near future. Our history is rich, our present is promising and our future is inspiring! Everyone loves a good story. What’s Yours?



*The Black Student Awareness Club at CHS recently took part in the “Put the ‘T’ in History” activity.*



# Inside the Box: Blue Ridge Mountain's Roamin' Cameraman Photos at the Montgomery Museum

by Sherry Wyatt

Earl Palmer (1905-1996) was born in Eastern Kentucky and lived his early life there. His father, a part-time coal miner and the owner of a small traveling circus died when he was very young. As a young boy, Palmer's mother sent him to live with foster parents. It was there that Palmer earned his first camera at age 7 by collecting Arbuckle Coffee labels. As a young man, he learned the art of photography under the tutelage of amateur and professional photographers. His training with photographer and engraver E. F. Carroll of Nashville in 1935 was particularly influential in the development of his darkroom techniques and aesthetics. It was Carroll who taught him to focus his photographs on the central subject, letting the edges of the photo be void of activity or focal points.

Earl Palmer worked for the A & P Grocery chain in Kentucky and Tennessee for twenty years. He left the company after being indicted on several counts of illegal merchandising for selling large quantities of damaged sugar to a moonshine syndicate. Palmer insisted he was following orders from A & P officials, but the company denied that claim. This breakdown of trust prompted Palmer to leave the firm in 1943 and move to Cambria, Virginia. Here, he opened Palmer's Market in a building that still stands at the corner of Cambria and Montgomery Streets in Christiansburg. Palmer closed the store in 1972 to fully devote himself to photography.

Palmer was already working as a freelance reporter and photographer prior to 1943, but the freedom of owning his own business allowed him to expand his photography work. His photographs and essays were published in *Standard Oil Company's Scenic South*, *Dodge News*, and *Mountain Life and Work* magazines as well as *The New York Times*, *Life Magazine*, and *National Geographic*. Of his move to Cambria, Palmer was quoted as saying it was "the best move I ever made – it turned me loose on photography."

Though Palmer was thoroughly invested in his photography, he was also dedicated to his adopted community. He was the last mayor of Cambria serving successive terms from 1958 until Cambria's merger with Christiansburg in 1964.

Earl Palmer is regarded as one of the preeminent folk life photographers in American history. His photographs capture the work and daily life of people throughout the Appalachian region of Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, North Carolina and Virginia. There is an emphasis on the traditional culture, with photographs of everything from baptisms to apple butter making. His business stationery and photograph stamp reflected the reputation he developed during his regional travels. He



*Photographer Earl Palmer in the field  
(News Messenger Collection)*

billed himself as "Blue Ridge Mountain's Roamin' Camera Man."

Dale Belcher, Palmer's protégé, wrote in 1987 about his experience working with Earl Palmer: "... we would go up in the mountains and take pictures. We would take the back roads to try to find things from the past." Belcher goes on to write: "When it comes to copying old faded family photographs, Earl is a master. He will sometimes spend two hours working on a negative. When a picture comes out of Earl Palmer's dark room, it is perfect!"

This description is easily applied to one of the five Palmer photographs held by the Montgomery Museum. The black and white photo is a copy of a nineteenth century photographic postcard entitled "Lattimer's Old Mill, Christiansburg, Va." A typewritten history of the mill is taped to the back of the photograph. It is not known if Palmer added this history, but it is certainly possible as several of the museum's Palmer photos have typed histories attached. The history notes that Lattimer's Mill on Crab Creek was probably built in the mid-1800s. The history also notes that the house in the background of the image was known as the "Plantation House" built in 1830 and served as a girls' dormitory after the establishment of the Christiansburg Industrial Institute at this site. The back of this photograph also carries Palmer's "Roamin' Cameraman" stamp.

The Montgomery Museum is very pleased to own examples of Earl Palmer's work. He received national acclaim in 1990 after the publication of many of his best pho-

## INSIDE THE BOX (CONTINUED)

tographs in the book *Appalachian Photographs of Earl Palmer*, written by Dr. Jean Haskell Speer. After Palmer's death, many of his photographic negatives were donated to Ferrum College. Other schools such as Berea College, University of Kentucky, and Virginia Tech also hold collections of his work.

To view some of Earl Palmer's photographs, including Montgomery County subjects such as: "Bookmobile in Montgomery County, Virginia;" "Virginia Polytechnic Institute Farms;" "Palmer's Market;" and "Sarver Homestead Log House and Barn," visit [http://imagebase.lib.vt.edu/browse.php?folio\\_ID=/palmer](http://imagebase.lib.vt.edu/browse.php?folio_ID=/palmer)



*Palmer's image of Lattimer's Mill and the stamped imprint he placed on the back of his photographs*

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# Nick Vitelli: An Artist's Unlikely Journey

BY FRED JONES

Seldom has the Montgomery Museum in Christiansburg generated as much buzz as with the upcoming exhibit by emerging artist Nick Vitelli running from Jan. 7 through Feb. 28.

Vitelli, of Christiansburg, took both the top prize and the people's choice award in Blacksburg's New River Art Biennial in October, beating out over 70 artists and 211 artworks. There was a time this success was hard for Vitelli to imagine.

Vitelli's first introduction to art was similar to that of many children. "My mom would always color with me and I thought how great that was." However, beyond those early experiences, he showed little aptitude or interest in art. He was home-schooled until he entered high school where he struggled with academics.

"I had some challenges with what people might say were learning disabilities," said Vitelli. Guidance counselors tried to convince him that college was not in his future. Fortunately, he attended Brevard High School in Transylvania County, N.C., where they allowed students a large degree of flexibility in selecting their courses. His sophomore year, on a whim, he took art and discovered he was good at it and enjoyed it. "From that point on I took every art class they would allow me to take all the way to Advanced Placement."

Due in large part to his art courses, Vitelli's grade point average was high enough to get him accepted at Queens



*Artist Nick Vitelli*

University in Charlotte, N.C. "It was not an art school," recalls Vitelli, "but it was a victory because I was not even supposed to get into college." While he enjoyed art, at this stage of his life Vitelli's true passion was soccer. He had been the starting goalie for the varsity team beginning as a freshman in high school and at one point played on five different teams. "My life revolved around soccer."

During open tryouts for the Queens soccer team Vitelli met with disaster. "I got sick prior to the tryouts and had a hard time playing." It greatly affected his ability to play and he was not selected for the squad. In hindsight, he

## AN ARTIST'S UNLIKELY JOURNEY (CONTINUED)

feels it was a blessing. “Who’s to say, but if I had made the team I probably would have finished school there and never pursued art,” said Vitelli. Instead, he left after the first year and moved to the New River Valley to be near his sister and a minister he knew from church camp.

“I took two years off and worked painting houses and doing plumbing,” said Vitelli. “In my spare time I continued to draw.” Eventually he enrolled at New River Community College with the goal of transferring to another school for an art degree. He was told that if he was serious about art he should apply to high profile art schools. Instead, he visited the art department at Virginia Tech (VT) in 2008.

“The day I walked into the VT art department art professor Robert Graham happened to be there. I talked to him for a while and I got the sense he really cared,” recalled Vitelli. “I realized even if they didn’t have the greatest funding or facilities, it’s really about the teachers and what you get out of it and I’m really happy I went there.” It was a good decision. Vitelli graduated magna cum laude from VT in 2011 with a B.F.A. in Studio Arts.

Much of his success as an artist Vitelli attributes directly to his background as an athlete. “Soccer helped me understand about personal growth. I challenge myself in art just as I did on the field. I’ve learned never to get too comfortable and take the easy road out. If I ask myself ‘what if’ I don’t hesitate to try it.” He feels some of his best work has resulted from such experimentation. Sports also taught him the importance of discipline.

His winning piece in the New River Art Biennial, the portrait titled “Cuba,” is steeped in discipline. At 26 by 40 inches, it took close to 140 hours to complete. Few artists would attempt a piece this large with even fat pastel sticks or paints. Astoundingly, he employed his favorite medium: colored pencils. “I told myself no one else works this large in colored pencil so why can’t I challenge myself to do it? Eventually I want to complete a piece 40 by 60 inches if I can find the right paper that size.”

Vitelli’s favorite model for his portraits is his beautiful wife of three years, Crystal. “She is my most amazing asset as an artist. Not only is she my muse, she has a brilliant business mind and helps promote my career from that angle.” His studio walls are, however, dominated by portraits of old men. “I have looked at a lot of faces and I see them differently than most people. It is more interesting to look at and work on older faces.”



*These are just a few of the portraits filling Nick Vitelli’s studio. (Photo by Teri Hoover)*

“Cuba” began as simply a drawing exercise. As Vitelli continued, he recognized its potential and the need for permission to show the work in public. “I contacted the photojournalist, Marlon Krieger, who captured this image while in Cuba,” Vitelli recounts. “Krieger was walking down a back street and noticed a man sitting in his door stoop. The photographer gestured to his camera and the man nodded consent. After the photo the man nodded and smiled. No words were ever spoken and the encounter took just seconds.” Just as the unknown man granted Krieger permission, so did Krieger give Vitelli all rights to use the photo for artistic reference.

Vitelli has set two goals for his career. The first he calls his practical goal—to teach art at the college level. “I would love to help people with art because I have seen how it can change lives; particularly for people who might struggle with academics.” To reach that goal he will apply to graduate programs next year. The second goal he terms his lofty goal—to become an artist represented in museums. With the discipline he applies to every challenge he sets for himself, this goal appears not so lofty at all.

His prize-winning “Cuba” has been entered in an international exhibit. Should it not be accepted it will be included in Vitelli’s upcoming show at the Montgomery Museum, and the public is invited to meet the artist at a reception, Thursday, Jan. 9 from 5 to 7 p.m.

If a walk through Nick Vitelli’s studio is any indication, this is an exhibit not to be missed, with or without “Cuba.”



Wishing you all a very Happy Holiday!



# MONTGOMERY MUSEUM

& LEWIS MILLER REGIONAL ART CENTER

300 S. Pepper Street Christiansburg, VA 24073  
540.382.5644 www.montgomerymuseum.org

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit #141  
Christiansburg, VA  
24073

### Museum Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 10:30-4:30

Branch at Meadowbrook (Shawsville) open Wed. & Sat., 10-12:00am

Executive Director: Sue Farrar

### Calendar of Events

- Dec. 23 - Jan. 2 Museum Closed
- Jan. 9 Reception 5-7 pm  
Nick Vitelli and CHS student art with  
"What's Your Story?" project
- Mar. 6 Exhibition of heritage musical  
instruments (associated with the  
Crooked Road Festival)
- Mar. 15 Pancake Breakfast 8-10 am
- Apr. 3 Reception for Auburn High School  
student art

Address Service Requested

Your memberships and donations make it possible for the museum to continue to collect, preserve, interpret and exhibit Montgomery County history and to encourage and showcase regional art and artists. Your generosity will be appreciated. The museum needs your support. The Museum is a non-profit 501(c)3 tax exempt organization. Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by tax regulations.

### Join the Museum and/or Make a Donation

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse or company \_\_\_\_\_

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Business Member \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ Patron \$250 \_\_\_\_\_

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Are you be interested in Volunteer Opportunities? \_\_\_\_\_

