

# Road, River, Rail: The Rise And Fall Of An American Waterfront



A SIGN from the Lexington railroad station hangs over stock and bond certificates from the railroads and their predecessors that served Lexington. (Stephanie Mikels Blevins photo)

## Miller's House

*continued from page B11*  
house into a transportation-oriented museum.

In late 2013, then City Manager Jon Ellestad invited a group of local historians to meet with the intent to form an organization to establish a museum. After numerous meetings Miller's House Museum Foundation Inc. was formalized as a nonprofit, 501c3 tax-exempt corporation.

Much work was required since the organization was starting from scratch. Substantial research was needed, stories, photographs and arti-

facts had to be gathered and curated into a history of the Point. Fortunately, this community is rich in resources, including the schools and various preservation groups. Through the interest and generosity of many individual's numerous gifts and loans have been provided to the museum.

Interpreting and telling the fascinating story of the transportation systems that served this area has been a delightful challenge. What is most gratifying being the fact that many of the "born heres" don't realize that Jordans Point was

heavily industrialized as now almost all traces are gone. Jordans Point is a historical gem that is only a short way from downtown Lexington.

Admission to the Miller's House is always free. Donations are gratefully accepted. The house will be open Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m. beginning May 22 and continuing through the fall.

*Editor's note: Dick Halseth is the president of the board of the Miller's House Museum.*

## Notes From Grand Opening Partners

The following agencies are among those partnering with the Miller's House Museum for this week's grand opening.

### Historic Lexington Foundation

Following a fundraising campaign, HLF purchased the Miller's House at Jordan's Point in 2000. With its Revolving Fund, HLF had earlier purchased a number of important and threatened buildings in Lexington's downtown. Those buildings were stabilized and ultimately sold to new owners to complete their restoration. However, the Miller's House was different, as HLF deeded the house to the city of Lexington. Today, it is a museum and the centerpiece of Jordans Point Park. To record and honor Jordans Point's rich history, this year, HLF submitted a nomination to have the area designated the Jordans Point Historic District.

### Boxerwood Nature Center

Boxerwood Nature Center has an abiding affection for Jordans Point. Boxerwood instructors rely on this unique promontory as a teaching site for some of its award-winning programs.

"Part of feeling 'at home' and caring about a place is knowing its stories — and Jordan's Point has plenty," said Boxerwood education director Elise Sheffield. "Place-based learning is a powerful way to motivate and engage students: it makes learning come alive."

Sheffield explained the site has been especially relevant for students at Lylburn Downing Middle School, which includes a day-long Boxerwood-led program the Point as part of their annual curriculum. "It's a great teaching location for American history,

stream-based science, and creative arts," said Sheffield.

### Chessie Nature Trail

The Friends of the Chessie Trail is a nonprofit group that serves to foster strong communications among Chessie Trail stakeholders, to advocate for the community's vision for the trail, and to organize citizen support for a well-maintained and safe trail. The trail is a 7.2-mile nature and hiking trail along the historic path of a Maury River canal and later the C&O Railroad, between Lexington and Buena Vista.

For information on the group's coming half-marathon and other events, visit [friendsofthechessietrail.org](http://friendsofthechessietrail.org) or email [chessietrail@gmail.com](mailto:chessietrail@gmail.com).

### Rockbridge Historical Society

For over 75 years, the Rockbridge Historical Society has led the community in working to "preserve and promote the histories of the Rockbridge area."

Free quarterly programs provide an opportunity to spotlight some of the smaller communities and family histories that have marked this county over four centuries. These programs also give RHS the platform to highlight the broader historical themes and connections to the Valley, Virginia and national histories.

RHS' landmark county history, "Remarkable Rockbridge," complements the society's long record of published presentations, back to 1939.

Growing educational programs in schools — featuring Lewis and Clark, Natural Bridge, an artistic, historic walking tour of Diamond Hill and a new Rockbridge History Bee — aim to ensure the legacies of local history for the

next generation of Rockbridge citizens.

Visit [www.RockHist.org](http://www.RockHist.org).

### Paxton House

The Paxton House Historical Society conducts preservation work on the c.1831 Elisha Paxton House in Buena Vista's Glen Maury Park and shares local history through its quarterly programs, oral history interviews, cemetery surveys, and living history events.

Tours of the Elisha Paxton house and gardens are available on selected days throughout the year and by appointment. The society also welcomes inquiries about use of the historic landmark for events and education programs. Born in 1785 on a farm overlooking the North river, Elisha Paxton undertook farming and navigation of the local rivers with great success. He was known as a leading bateaux boat captain for the county, a founding director of the Rockbridge Agriculture Society, and a prominent Rockbridge County citizen.

To learn more, send email to [PaxtonHouseHistoricalSociety@gmail.com](mailto:PaxtonHouseHistoricalSociety@gmail.com) or find the organization on Facebook.

### Rockbridge Civil War Round Table

Highlighting its motto "Understanding the past, shaping the future," the Rockbridge Civil War Round Table promotes, explores, and stimulates interest in and discussion of all aspects of the American Civil War while supporting the preservation of Civil War sites, artifacts, and monuments.

Each month it sponsors a presentation by an expert on a particular aspect of the period. It also offers special programs that highlight Civil War resources available at local universities.



ABOVE, the diorama of Jordans Point shows Moses Mill Road over Woods Creek, with the Miller's House on the left and Lexington Roller Mill on the right. (Stephanie Mikels Blevins photo) AT LEFT, Bill Peel paints the backdrop for the diorama. The backdrop is 32 feet long and took months to complete.

## Touring

*continued from pagexx*  
Upstairs is a 32-foot-long diorama depicting Jordans Point in the 1930-1950 period. You'll see the Miller's House, the Lexington Roller Mill, the covered bridge, railroad trestle over the Maury River and the East Lexington bridge. Along Old Buena

Vista Road, you will find the East Lexington railroad station, bulk oil facilities and the wye where the B&O and C&O railroads converged on Lexington. You will also see models of the Nelson Street bridge, the old Harper & Agnor facility, the Lexington railroad station, Higgins

and Irving building, Huger, Davidson, Sales wholesale facility, a stockyard and several houses on Myers Street.

There is also a diorama of an iron furnace from the 1850s, displays of railroad artifacts including a set of dishes used by the B&O railroad in their dining cars.



Cadet parade, 1925:  
Passing the Alexander-Withrow House (VMI Archives)

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