

WINDOW SHOPPING FOR KNOWLEDGE

WHY THE PRINTED BOOKS IN YOUR LIBRARY
WILL NEVER BE OBSOLETE

◇◇◇◇◇◇ by Kyle Warmack, Program Officer ◇◇◇◇◇◇



One of the inviting new reading nooks overlooking Capitol Street in Charleston's recently refurbished Kanawha County Public Library. Photograph by Kyle Warmack.

In one of those happy intellectual convergences that occur every so often in life, I recently encountered an article in *The Walrus*—a Canadian literary magazine—hot on the heels of the recent, triumphant reopening of Charleston's beautifully renovated Kanawha County Library.

No self-respecting lover of books could have turned away from the article's intriguing premise. It was entitled, "Twilight of the Libraries: What Gets Lost When Books Go Off-Site and Online." (*Ed:* read the article in full at <https://thewalrus.ca/library-digitization>).

Written by Andrew Stauffer, professor of English at the University of Virginia, the piece makes a case for how overly-aggressive deaccessioning—getting rid—of books from public libraries can result in a loss of institutional memory. Librarians collect books at different times for different reasons, Stauffer posits, and the willy-nilly tossing overboard of traditional print material just because it is now digitally available elsewhere risks pitching out something important: the concrete record of what was collected and read by that library in each of its evolutionary stages.

Each library has "a historical integrity as an archive of what we gathered and what we knew. Both directly and inadvertently, for better and worse, old shelves tell stories we need to hear. Moreover, future generations will need to know that we heard them, in all of their specific details." The library as a physical repository of books, he says, makes it the "guardian" of "the textual humanities."

I have no bones to pick with the professor's case, but Stauffer doesn't approach another point I believe is essential to the library's role in the humanities: It is the most publicly accessible warehouse for the knowledge we don't know we don't know. The ultimate place for encountering that which we were unaware of seeking.

A bazaar in which to go...window shopping for knowledge.

Searching digitally for information requires input to jumpstart the process. When you type in the web address **google.com**, you're conveyed to a relatively blank page with an even more barren search bar. You pause. You consider the information you hope to obtain. You type in a word anticipated to return desired results.

The algorithm toiling deep in Google's Cretan labyrinth instantly chucks out a thousand thousand pages in response. The topmost several have usually paid for that privileged position with cold, hard, advertising dollars. And Google knows full well that more than half the time, you won't click past the first batch of results it gives you.

Two important filters have thus dictated your path to knowledge.

First, the initial query you shaped: what you thought you needed to know, which you consciously had to craft into the query you thought would get you there.

Second, the algorithm's best guess at what you wanted, limited by the pages it could find based on the metadata that was or wasn't available on each page. And we're not even talking about how much that little Google minotaur might have rigged the game for a little ad revenue.

But your library wouldn't do that to you.

Breezing through the remodeled Kanawha County Library's glittering new stacks this summer—open for the first time since the pandemic began—I was almost immediately struck by the contrast between the internet-based information funnel to which we've all become accustomed, versus the wide-open vistas of trawling the library shelves with only the loosest of objectives in mind. I strolled to their West Virginia section to make sure it hadn't downsized during the transition. Pretty soon I was walking away with four books in my arms.

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"MOTHER OF THE REGIMENT"

LAURA JACKSON ARNOLD,
SISTER OF THE LEGENDARY "STONEWALL"

by Jeffrey Webb

Editor's note: What follows is a reproduction of a new West Virginia Encyclopedia (e-WV) article on Laura Jackson Arnold. While it's not a habit of *The Broad Side* to reprint material from elsewhere, we thought this would be a good opportunity to show how the Council continues to nurture West Virginia's culture and history online.

www.wvencyclopedia.org

First issued in 2006 as a collector's print volume, e-WV moved onto the web in 2010. Each year, the Council commissions dozens of new articles on West Virginia topics of historical and cultural interest. It remains one of West Virginia's premiere educational resources, introducing millions of people worldwide to the rich tapestry of the Mountain State.

Laura Jackson Arnold, the younger sister of Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, was a nurse during the Civil War. She was born in Clarksburg on March 27, 1826, the youngest child of lawyer Jonathan Jackson and Julia Beckwith Neale Jackson.

Orphaned at a young age, Laura and her brother were sent to live with relatives at Jackson's Mill in Lewis County. In 1835, she was sent to live with her uncle Alfred Neale and his wife, at a home located on an island in the Ohio River near Parkersburg.

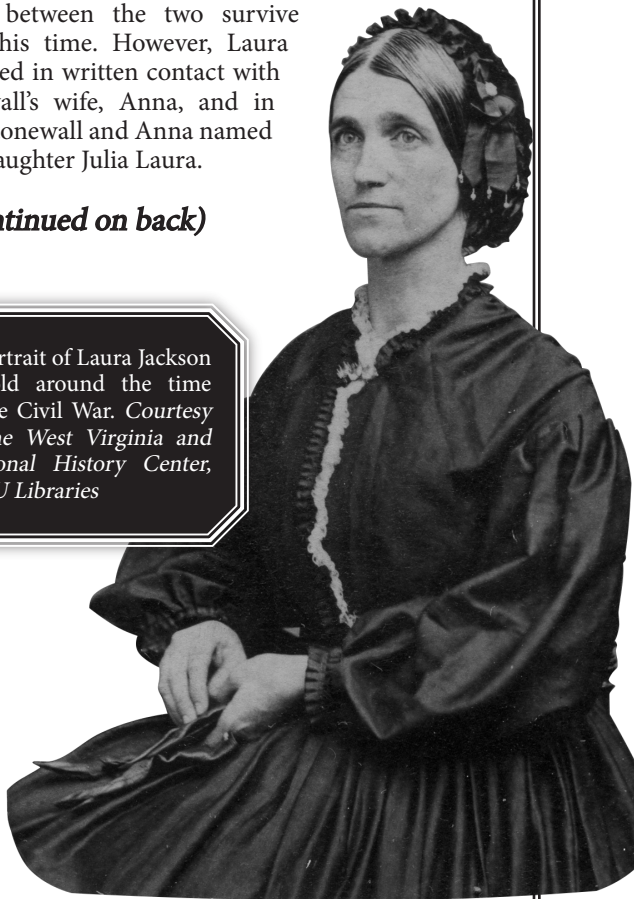
In 1844, Laura married Jonathan Arnold. The couple settled in Beverly, Randolph County. Laura gave birth to four children: Thomas Jackson (1845-1933), Anna Grace (1848-1878), Stark William (1851-1898), and Laura Zell (1853-1854). According to the 1860 census, the family owned four slaves.

In the years preceding the Civil War, Laura maintained a close relationship with her brother Stonewall, corresponding frequently. Stonewall visited Laura and Jonathan in Beverly, even going so far as to buy carpet for the stairs in the home. In 1859, Laura visited her brother's family in Lexington, Virginia, when she traveled there to retrieve her oldest son, whom Laura had sent to Lexington for tutoring in 1858 at Stonewall's request.

The start of the Civil War seems to have brought an end to Laura and Stonewall's correspondence; no letters between the two survive from this time. However, Laura remained in written contact with Stonewall's wife, Anna, and in 1862 Stonewall and Anna named their daughter Julia Laura.

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A portrait of Laura Jackson Arnold around the time of the Civil War. Courtesy of the West Virginia and Regional History Center, WVU Libraries



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FOR KNOWLEDGE
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You see, for months we’ve been working on an updated version of the Council’s Civil War and statehood traveling exhibit, *Born of Rebellion*. I’ve been constantly on the lookout for texts to supply primary source quotes or intimate glimpses into West Virginians’ everyday lives during the struggle. Stumbling into the striking red spine of *Rebecca Harding Davis: A Life Among Writers* by Sharon Harris (WVU Press, 2018) reminded me that I’d been meaning to further investigate Wheeling’s literary genius. Davis frequently rubbed elbows with Union leaders and generals in “Restored” Virginia’s wartime capital, and her fiction concerning the war was appearing in *The Atlantic* as the conflict unfolded around her. Yup, I needed this. Other titles were soon stacking high atop Davis.

Lugging my armful of treasures around, I steamed past the reference shelf containing Charleston city directories ranging back a century. Sure, there are copies in the State Archives, but the public library has longer visiting hours and is open on Mondays. There’s that pesky local history project for which I still need to check a listing in the 1920s...

There’s no arguing that one can’t stumble into information on the internet—we do it all the time. But consider the *physical* act of browsing: Your natural field of vision is so much wider than any screen allows, which, paired with your movement through the library space, conspires to bump you into unexpected influences. You cross the room to ask the librarian a question, and your eyes take in the thousandfold stimuli of book covers you didn’t come to search for—but they touch the fringe of your consciousness nonetheless. Perhaps make you pause to pick one up, prompting fresh discoveries.

I’m not trying to tout one form of information-seeking as superior to another. Every tool has its place. The online search bar is par excellence for a targeted deep-dive, since a computer can scan countless records for a specific word faster than any set of human eyes. When it comes to delivering you directly to reliable information, however, that same powerful tool has become fraught with distractions, obstacles, and conflicts of interest. When it’s time to truly immerse yourself in the process of learning—to window shop and find what you didn’t know you needed—your library can’t be beat.



WHAT SAYETH THE READER?

You’ve got **The Broad Side’s** tenth issue in your hands! It’s been over a year since we began putting out this quirky little publication to highlight the atlas obscura of the humanities all across West Virginia. Since then, we’ve run thoughtful little pieces about World War II factories, moonshiners, Thomas Jefferson’s law books, Civil War battles, authors like Davis Grubb and Julia Keller, and more.

There’s plenty more to write about, but we want to know what you think! We’ve prepared a 10-question reader’s poll so you can tell us more about what you’d like to see in future issues of **The Broad Side**. Type the link below into your browser and share your opinion before September 1, 2022!

<http://bit.ly/tbspoll>

“MOTHER OF THE REGIMENT”
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It is possible that Laura and Stonewall grew estranged because of the war, as she was a staunch Unionist, while he served as one of the Confederacy’s top generals. For the majority of the war, following the Battle of Rich Mountain, Beverly was occupied by federal forces. During this time, Laura opened her home to care for sick and injured Union troops, as well as some Confederate troops. Union General George B. McClellan, a classmate of Stonewall’s at West Point, was a notable visitor to the home. After her brother’s death in 1863 at the Battle of Chancellorsville, Laura reportedly was saddened, yet said she “would rather know that he was dead than to have him a leader in the rebel army.” In 1864, Laura wrote a letter to President Abraham Lincoln strongly expressing her support of the Union.

Laura’s marriage also was strained by the war. Unlike his wife, Jonathan Arnold opposed the Union cause. Laura eventually filed for divorce, resulting in a lengthy case in which Jonathan claimed his wife was unfaithful during the war by having affairs with soldiers that stayed at their home. Laura’s lawyer countered by explaining that for many years Laura suffered from a medical condition in which intercourse was painful, implying that her husband’s allegations were unlikely to be true. In August 1870, the judge ruled in Laura’s favor, awarding her \$400 per year.

In her later years, Laura lived at a sanitarium in Columbus, Ohio. Many veterans honored her in the decades following the Civil War. In 1897, she was named an honorary member of the Society of the Army of West Virginia. At a 1905 reunion of the 5th West Virginia Cavalry, she was proclaimed the “Mother of the Regiment.” In 1910, Laura returned to her home state. She spent her final days living in Buckhannon, Upshur County. She died on September 24, 1911, and is buried in Buckhannon’s Heavner Cemetery.

In 2018, a state historical marker was unveiled outside Laura and Jonathan’s home in Beverly, commemorating Laura’s contributions during the Civil War.



Always check with the venue or hosting organization of an event before attending, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, as schedules may change without the knowledge of the Council.

EVENTS AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2022

Aug 6 Walt Disney - History Alive! Bridgeport Public Library, Harrison County. 12pm	Aug 20 Diary of a POW - Selected readings from “Guests of the Emperor”. Brooke County Public Library, Wellsburg. 1pm	Sep 17 World War II Living History - Exhibit opening. Cockayne Farmstead, Glen Dale. 10am
Aug 8 Walt Disney - History Alive! North Berkeley Public Library, Falling Waters. 2pm	Aug 26- Sep 4 5th Annual WV Shakespeare Festival - Various performances, Huntington City Hall.	Sep 22 Amicus Curiae Lecture - by Lawrence Norden. Brad D. Smith Foundation Hall, Marshall University, Huntington. 7pm
Aug 8 Gabriel Arthur - History Alive! Cass Scenic Railroad State Park, Pocahontas County. 11:30am	Sep 1 Getting Conspiracy Theories Right - Amicus Curiae Lecture by Joseph E. Uscinski. Brad D. Smith Foundation Hall, Marshall University, Huntington. 7pm	Sep 23- Sep 30 Barbara Kingsolver - Appalachian Heritage Writer in Residence events. Shepherd University.
Aug 8 Walt Disney - History Alive! Hedgesville Public Library, Berkeley County. 6:30pm	Sep 10 Pearl S. Buck - History Alive! Pearl S. Buck Birthplace, Hillsboro. 2pm	Sep 24 Abigail Adams - History Alive! Hardy County Heritage Weekend, location TBA. 11:00am
Aug 10 The Red Arrow - Selected readings of new novel with author William Brewer. Taylor Books, Charleston. 6:00pm	Sep 17 My Time on a Japanese Hellship - Readings from survivors’ diaries. Brooke County Public Library, Wellsburg. 1pm	Sep 24 Mark Twain - History Alive! Fire Company Grounds, Capon Bridge. 12:30am
Aug 13 Col. Ruby Bradley - History Alive! Museum of American Glass, Weston. 7pm		

The West Virginia Humanities Council, an independent nonpartisan nonprofit, is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Council is supported by the NEH, the State of West Virginia, and contributions from the private sector. The purposes of the West Virginia Humanities Council are educational, and its mission is to support a vigorous program in the humanities statewide in West Virginia. The Broad Side is ©2021 by the West Virginia Humanities Council. All rights reserved.

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