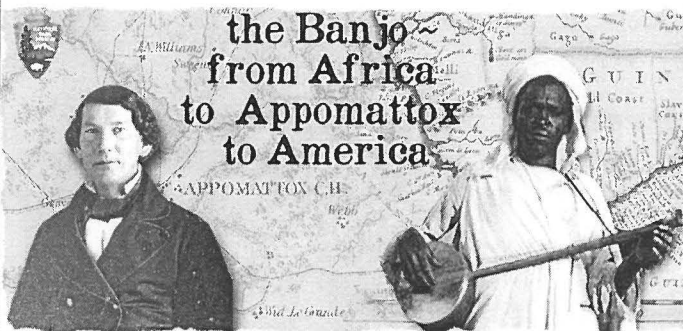




## Farmville - Prince Edward Historical Society

P.O. Box 546  
Farmville, Virginia 23901

May 2014



**David Wooldridge**  
Appomattox Court House  
National Park Service Ranger  
Will Present a Program on  
the History of the Banjo

**Prince Edward Historical Society**

**Tues., May 20, 2014 7PM**

**Historic Farmville Train Station**  
**510 West Third Street.**

**Tuesday, May 20, 2014, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.**  
**Guests always welcome**

### **MEMBERSHIP FEES NOW DUE FOR 2014**

All membership fees are now past due for the calendar year January – December 2014. You may pay your 2014 fee at our monthly meeting or send to PO Box 546, Farmville, VA 23901 – \$15.00 individual/\$25.00 family.

### **Joel Sweeney & the Banjo” – presented by David Wooldridge**

David Delender Wooldridge is a Museum Technician with Appomattox Court House National Historic Park. He is a native of the greater Lynchburg area, and has taught middle and high school social studies. For 17 years David has worked in the shadow of his great-great-great-Grandmother Mariah Wright's house, preserved as part of Appomattox Court House National Historical Park. His great-great-great-uncle joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> VA Cavalry along with Sam Sweeney and the rest of their musical neighbors. David received his

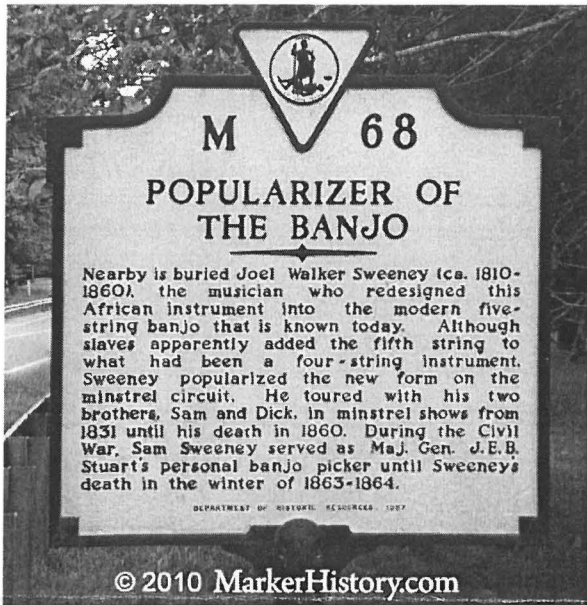
undergraduate degree in history and education from Radford University and his master's degree in education from the Curry School at the University of Virginia. David has played and studied the banjo for over 15 years, authored lesson plans and articles on the history of the banjo, and made numerous banjo presentations and performances. He lives in Lowesville, Virginia, with his wife and three children.

David will tell the story of Joel Sweeney, the first documented white banjo player, his musical family and the Africans of Appomattox and the role each played in the origins of the 5 string banjo.

Appomattox Court House was the birthplace of Joel Sweeney (1810-1860). Joel, along with the rest of his musical family, including a brother who spent the Civil War playing as “Jeb Stuart's personal minstrel,” went on to become the preeminent name in early banjo history helping to bring the banjo into popular American music and culture.

The leader of the Virginia Minstrels was Joel Walker Sweeney who was born in Buckingham County, Virginia, (now Appomattox Co.) in a log cabin in 1810, near the site where the Civil War ended. Sweeney, learned to play a four-string gourd banjo at age 13, from the black men working on his father's farm. He also learned to play the fiddle, sing, dance, and imitate animal sounds. Until this time, all performances on the banjo seem to have been from black players. Joel started traveling through central Virginia in the early 1830's, playing his five-string banjo, singing, reciting, and imitating animals during county court sessions. These performances seem to be the first time that the banjo had been performed in a show. He soon became a star in a circus which toured Virginia and North Carolina for several years. He eventually performed on his banjo





in New York City, and even toured England, Scotland, and Ireland performing for Queen Victoria in 1843. Sweeney's introduction of the 5-string banjo to England led to the rise in popularity of the banjo there which has continued to the present.

Joel Sweeney died of "dropsy" at Appomattox on October 29, 1860, at the age of 50. His brother Richard also died the same year. Sampson "Sam" D. Sweeney, the youngest brother, died January 13, 1864, of smallpox.

## Upcoming Meeting – June 17, 2014

**Battle of Staunton River Bridge – Shane Newcombe and Janet Johnson**

The **Battle of Staunton River Bridge** was an engagement on June 25, 1864, between Union and Confederate forces during Wilson-Kautz Raid of the American Civil War. The battle took place around the Staunton River Bridge, over the Staunton River, in Halifax and Charlotte counties, Virginia.



The defense of the Staunton River Bridge ensured the survival of the Richmond & Danville rail supply line, which was a key part of the chain supplying the besieged Confederate forces in Petersburg. However, Lee was forced to abandon Petersburg in April 1865 when his supply lines were finally cut.

## May in Prince Edward County History

- 5-1-1832 Gov. Philip Watkins McKinney born in Buckingham
- 5-2-1894 First official proposal by trustees to move Presbyterian seminary from its 70-year existence at Hampden-Sydney
- 5-3-1905 Farmville Guard left for Richmond to attend funeral of Major General Fitzhugh Lee
- 5-4-1895 Farmville Guard called to Pocahontas to guard working men from violence at the hands of strikers
- 5-4-1901 The first "dry" Saturday in Farmville history; no liquor sales
- 5-5-1942 World War II sugar rationing begins
- 5-5-1996 WFLO tower collapses
- 5-6-1776 William Watts and William Booker elected Prince Edward representatives to convention to establish constitution for Commonwealth, to replace colonial rule
- 5-6-1965 J.J. Newberry Department Store at Third and Main burned.
- 5-7-1846 Town and citizens decide to buy \$100,000 stock to secure railroad service to Farmville; original South Side Railroad proposal would have linked county seats, taking railroad through Worsham
- 5-7-1978 Farmville Flea Market opened at new Randolph Warehouse
- 5-10-1905 Odd Fellows Lodge instituted
- 5-10-1926 Dr. W. E. Anderson died
- 5-11-1964 U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy visits Farmville schools
- 5-12-1894 Farmville Herald begins editorial campaign to keep Union Seminary at Hampden-Sydney
- 5-12-1920 Fire department draft horse "Charlie" drops dead after pulling engine to fire on Buffalo Street
- 5-14-1937 Patterson's Drug Company buys stock of Canada Drug

### Company

- 5-15-1942 Gasoline rationing began during World War II
- 5-17-1954 U.S. Supreme Court rules on Brown v. Board, unanimously, striking down "separate-but-equal" public education with Prince Edward case included
- 5-20-1834 Birth of Hampden-Sydney president Richard McIlwaine, who represented Prince Edward county in Virginia Constitutional Convention
- 5-23-1901 The Masons meet for the first time in their new Lodge room
- 5-24-1777 Thomas Anderson Morton, who operated first store in Farmville on Second St. opposite Morton's tavern, was born
- 5-24-1833 Death of area famous Congressman John Randolph of Roanoke
- 5-24-1902 Charlotte, Farmville and James River Valley Railroad Company organized
- 5-26-1898 Farmville Guard leaves for service in Spanish-American War
- 5-26-1918 Farmville Guard leaves for service in World War I
- 5-27-1887 J. W. Dunnington, tobacconist, died
- 5-28-1832 Charles H. Erambert, lt. Farmville Guard, photographer, born
- 5-28-1963 Civil War era locomotive "The General" visits Farmville
- 5-29-1736 Birth of Patrick Henry, sometime resident of, and delegate from, Prince Edward
- 5-30-1905 First memorial service for Confederate dead held at the cemetery in Cumberland
- 5-31-1897 Earthquake and aftershocks rattled window panes