



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Story of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 4, 2010

Contact: Jennifer Guild, Senior Officer for Public Relations and Marketing
(804) 342-9665, jguild@vahistorical.org

Things That Make You Say “Huh?” “Wow!” and “Ewww.” New Virginia Historical Society Exhibit Features Bizarre, Weird, and Just Plain Odd Items from the Collection

Richmond, VA—Disassembled skull bones. A hair wreath. An infant’s smallpox scab. Tree fungus art. These are not items that most visitors would expect to see when visiting the Virginia Historical Society (VHS). But one way or another all of these weird pieces, and many more, have crept into the society’s collections since its founding in 1831. Beginning Saturday, June 12, 2010, the VHS offers a new exhibition, *Bizarre Bits: Oddities from the Collection*, that showcases more than forty of the most unusual objects and materials in the vast VHS holdings.

“The only common tie between the items featured in this exhibition is that they are all bizarre—objects about odd people and events or with an unusual color, shape, or purpose,” said William Rasmussen, lead curator at the Virginia Historical Society. “As visitors walk through the show, I image they will be asking themselves, ‘What in the world is coming up next?’ and ‘Why did the VHS take all this stuff?’”

Historical items range from the bullet that killed the first Confederate officer in the American Civil War, nails from the part of the Virginia State Capitol that collapsed in 1870, a 1,000-year-old piece of wood from the Canary Islands, a 1908 trepan that was used for perforating the skull to treat health problems related to intracranial diseases, records from Princess Anne County about the witchcraft trial of Grace Sherwood, and silhouettes cut by an armless woman using her mouth.

Personal items include pieces of President James Madison’s hair, Jefferson Davis’s cigar, the secret diary of William Byrd II, letters telling of fingernail clippings sent by a naval officer to his wife as tokens of endearment, John Randolph of Roanoke’s dressing gown that he wore in his duel with Henry Clay in 1826, and a late 19th century “Tramp Art” bureau last owned by George Lander, an African American physician in Lynchburg.

- more -

Post Office Box 7311
Richmond, Virginia 23221
www.vahistorical.org





VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Story of Virginia

“The peculiar, perplexing, and sometimes even grotesque objects on display in the show provide insight into the hopes, fears, assumptions, and practices of the past that are foreign to us now,” Rasmussen said. “The VHS became a repository at a time when ideas about collecting were different than they are today. It is no surprise to find in the collection a range of curiosities. It makes us wonder what types of things were turned away!”

Admission to the VHS to see *Bizarre Bits: Oddities from the Collection* is free. Rasmussen will give a gallery walk on Wednesday, July 14, 2010, at noon. The exhibition closes on February 13, 2011.

“As visitors walk through this exhibition, we hope they are thinking about what the bizarre and odd items from today might be,” Rasmussen added. “What will future generations—100 years from now—think about the objects and materials that the VHS is collecting from this time period? And what do visitors have in their own homes that might be even more unusual than the objects on display in this exhibit?”

#

For more than 182 years, the **Virginia Historical Society** (VHS) has been connecting people to America’s past through the unparalleled story of Virginia. The VHS—a history museum and research library—features award-winning exhibitions that are entertaining and educational for visitors of all ages. The Society is the only museum with all of Virginia’s history under one roof—all centuries, all regions, and all topics are covered. Although designated the Official State Historical Society, the VHS is a privately funded non-profit organization that relies on contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations to sustain its operations. The VHS is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond’s Museum District. Admission is free. Museum hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m.–5 p.m. Library hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. For more information, call (804) 358-4901, visit www.vahistorical.org, or find the VHS on Facebook and Twitter.

