

Program interprets living history

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In December 1859, members of the local militia unit known as the West Augusta Guard witnessed history in the making. They stood guard at the hanging of John Brown in Harpers Ferry.



Members of the West Augusta Guard pose on the steps of the Augusta County Courthouse during a living-history demonstration late last year. (Submitted)

In keeping with its ongoing commemoration of the Civil War's Sesquicentennial, the Augusta County Historical Society welcomes members of the West Augusta Guard re-enacting group to present a program at 7 p.m. on March 11 at the Smith Center. The program, "The West Augusta Guard: Interpreting Heritage through Living History," is part of the popular Stuart Speaker Series offered in the Smith Center by the society in the spring and fall.

For the guard, John Brown's hanging was just the beginning. Over the next five years, the company, formed in 1858, would witness more than enough history for many lifetimes, as they became intimately involved in the tragic conflict known as the American Civil War. Soon after war broke out in 1861, the unit melded into the Confederate Army as part of what eventually became known as the famed Stonewall Brigade.

The modern-day West Augusta Guard formed in the fall of 2007 to remember and document those original soldiers. Today, in addition to traditional battle re-enacting, the group has dedicated itself to educating the public about the life of common soldiers and civilians through accurate living history demonstrations and educational outreach to schools and other groups.

Several military and civilian re-enactors, in appropriate 19th-century attire, will present the evening program. In addition to presenting the history of the company and explaining what sources have been used to document its activities, the group will talk about some of the living history programs with which it has been involved.

The talk is the second of the Alexander H.H. Stuart Speaker Series. The program will be held in the second floor lecture room of the Smith Center in downtown Staunton. The program is free to historical society members and is \$5 for non-members.