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An Afternoon with Jonathan Swift, Long John Silver and Author Robert A. Prather

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By Hope J. Gibbs
alexandrianews.org

Robert A. Prather, author of "The Strange Case of Jonathan Swift and the Real Long John Silver," was at the Barrett Branch Library on Saturday for a book signing and discussion. The old library on Queen Street was the ideal setting for this event since this is where Prather conducted much of his research pertaining to Alexandria with assistance from archivist Rita Holtz.



Robert A. Prather. (Photo: Hope J. Gibbs)

Holtz introduced Prather and his wife Karen at the event, talking briefly about the historic



Karen Prather (Photo by Hope J. Gibbs)

materials found in the Local History and Special Collections at Barrett that reveal Jonathan Swift's life here in Alexandria. Many of these materials are referenced in Prather's book, including such finds as photos of Swift Alley and a building at 202-204 King Street once owned by Jonathan Swift.

"You would be surprised how much valuable information I found here in Alexandria," Prather said. "The collection of old newspapers shows that Swift would place ads. By

reading these materials, I was able to determine that Swift indeed was involved in ships and shipping. And another interesting fact was his connection with the salt trade. Salt is an important component in the processing of lead from which silver is a byproduct. Both of these facts are important to the legend of Jonathan Swift and his lost silver mines."



Rita Holtz, Karen Prather, Robert A. Prather and George Combs. (Photo: Hope J. Gibbs)

Prather, who hails from Kentucky the birthplace of the Swift tales, originally began investigating and collecting information for a research paper. However, one interesting find led to another and then to another and before long, Prather found himself with a multitude of facts that supported theories he had surrounding the inspiration of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic, "Treasure Island."

"The Swift subject is something that I have known about my whole life, but I have been very interested in it since the mid-80s," Prather said. "I had been doing some metal detecting in early 2000, and in 2003, I was out on a dig with a group from southern Indiana. We were all standing around talking when someone brought up the story of Jonathan Swift and the lost silver mine. I shared my thoughts with the group, and they urged me to get it down on paper. So, the book initially began as a 90-page report for an archeology group."

Kentucky history shows the Swift legend spread to various states including Virginia, Tennessee, and the Carolinas. It is Prather's belief that the legend went west with miners.



Prather presenting. (Photo: Hope J. Gibbs)



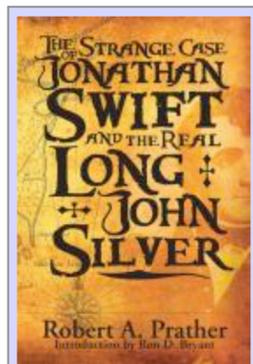
Author Robert A. Prather. (Photo: Hope J. Gibbs)

"In Jonathan Swift's day and before that time period, people were captivated by the search and mining for precious metals," he said. "This fueled the legend and no doubt provided a basis for stories of hidden treasures."

The connection between Jonathan Swift and "Treasure Island"

Prather has pieced together an historical puzzle of adventure, intrigue, pirates, lost treasure, and cryptic codes supported by documentation which suggests Stevenson was inspired by the Jonathan Swift legend. Jim Hawkins, Billy Bones, Long John Silver and the rest of the Treasure Island crew are skillfully connected to Jonathan Swift and, Jonathan Swift is very much

connected to Alexandria.



"The Strange Case of Jonathan Swift and the Real Long John Silver." (Courtesy photo)

"The Strange Case of Jonathan Swift and the Real Long John Silver" was published in 2007. The book won a Silver Addy award, presented by the American Advertising Federation.

The book is available at major book stores and on-line.