

History In The Making -
Research Leads To Unexpected Finds
Daily News-Record (Harrisonburg, VA)
August 5, 2006
Estimated printed pages: 1

NEWMARKET - Every small town has a story. That's what Betty Karol Wilson says.

"When people live in small towns, [they] think everything happens in the big cities, and that's not true," Wilson said.

Wilson leads **walking tours** of historic **New Market**. Since she started researching the town's history eight months ago, she has learned much that cannot be found on a historic marker.

When she began her research, one home in the area was known to have a hiding place. The owners allowed Wilson, as a historical researcher, to view the secret room. She said a part of the wall, if triggered correctly, springs back revealing a passageway to a room under the house large enough for people to stand.

Wilson said this is uncommon, as underground water levels in **New Market** tend to be unusually high.

Since she has started her research, she has learned of three other houses that have similar hiding places.

Wilson believes that these were most likely used as part of a human smuggling operation, perhaps to help pacifists who would not join the Civil War armies to flee town. The hiding places also could have been part of the Underground Railroad, which helped slaves reach the North and freedom prior to the Emancipation Proclamation.

During her research, Wilson even learned that she is related to one of **New Market's** past surgeons, C.C. Henkel.

Wilson said the community has also been helpful in supplying information about their homes or family ancestry.

"The longer I'm in this, the more people tell me and bring to me," Wilson said. "The people in the town have been so appreciative of our history."

- Alicia Wotring