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Moods of park revealed in new photo exhibition

By Val Van Meter
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER

A photography exhibit featuring Shenandoah National Park returns the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley to its roots.

Opening Friday and on display through Feb. 3, the Changing Exhibitions Gallery will feature the moods of the park for 21 years, as seen through the lens of Hullahen Williams Moore.

A Richmond lawyer whose roots grow deep in Rockbridge County, Moore was inspired by legendary photographer Ansel Adams to shoot the scenes of the park that later became a book, "Shenandoah: Views of Our National Park."



Photos by Hullahen Williams Moore are ready to hang in the Changing Exhibitions Gallery at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley.
(Rick Foster)

"We like it that it's a Valley theme," said Cory Garman, registrar at the museum, who was hanging the show this week. "That brings it much closer to home."

This is the third show in the Changing Exhibitions hall to be staged in partnership with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, according to Jennifer Esler, MSV executive director.

The exhibit follows a showing of some of the best photographs to appear in National Geographic magazine.

"We don't have many photographs in our permanent exhibits," said MSV public relations coordinator Julie Armel. The interest sparked by the two photo exhibits will carry over into the fall, she added.

Clarie Comer, chief of interpretation at Shenandoah National Park, will offer a lecture and pictorial history of the development of the park at 7 p.m. Oct. 12, and on Sept. 8, the museum will offer a course for children, aged 8 to 12, in producing "photograms" — in which plant material is placed on photographic paper and exposed to light. The two-hour course will begin at 10 a.m.

Moore's black and white landscapes are a sharp contrast to the previous show, which featured a large number of color images.

"Black and white pictures don't lie," Esler said. "You don't get lost in the attraction of the colors."

"I enjoy the tones," said Moore in a telephone interview from his home in Richmond.



Cory Garman (right), registrar at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, pulls a print by Hullahen Williams Moore, "Flame Cloud," from a crate belonging to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. At left is Jim Clark, building maintenance coordinator. The two were getting ready to hang the show, "Shenandoah: Views of Our National Park," in the Changing Exhibitions Gallery.
(Rick Foster)

With black and white film, he added, the photographer is dealing with shape and the range of shades from deepest black to purest white.

His use of a view camera — which produces large 4- by 5-inch negatives that can yield extra-large prints — leads to sharp, crisp images.

"I can take some credit for it," he said with a chuckle. "The sharpness is in the camera and how you can manipulate the camera. But it's the size of the negative."

Another significant fact: a view camera shows the photographer the image upside-down and backwards.

Moore does his own developing, which gives him considerable control over the finished image.

His interest in photography goes back to his high school days, but he really began to focus on his hobby about 30 years ago, when he asked his wife for a very specific type of camera for Christmas.

"I tried to leave nothing to chance," he said, in describing what he wanted.

His wife also signed him up for a 10-day workshop in 1979 with Ansel Adams at his studio in the Yosemite Valley, where many of his most famous photographs were taken.

"It was a real thrill, to see the master at work," Moore said. "He was Ansel, not Mr. Adams. He was a wonderful human being."

Adams was gentle with his students, Moore said. He would suggest that they "consider" doing this or that to improve their work.

Moore said the most important lesson he learned was to concentrate on the composition and the exposure times needed before attempting a picture.

"You have to think carefully about what you're doing," and that holds true for every photograph, Moore added, whether it is made with a disposable camera or the latest and greatest technology.

Adams also told the students that they would be "judged by the pictures you show. The trash can is just as valuable in the darkroom as the office."

At the workshop, Moore also studied darkroom technique with John Sextant. He's "the finest printmaker anywhere, Moore said. "I've been very lucky." A man who has always loved the outdoors, Moore found a perfect place for a landscape photographer. "I began to concentrate on Shenandoah National Park."

He had a box for images that he felt deserved to be kept: "After 17 or 18 years of putting some in and taking some out, I thought I had a book."

Moore wrote two essays on his feelings about the park and his days with his camera exploring it. The volume was published by the University of Virginia in 2003.

The essays examine the moods of the park in its different seasons. It's hard to pick a favorite, Moore said.

Fall and winter are wonderful times, and usually quiet and peaceful. Spring is glorious with its new birth and growth.

"It's all very special. There's magic in very season of the year," and Moore has captured much of it in his photographs.

He has also chronicled time's effects.

In the show are two pictures of the same tree, shot seven years apart.

The shape of the tree at the Baldface Mountain Overlook caught his eye in 1981. In 1988, cloud traces drew him to the spot, and he realized he had shot it before. But the second time, the tree was a skeleton against the sky.

Although Moore describes many of the wild creatures that call the park home, viewers won't see their photographs in the show or his book.

Many of his images demand long exposure times to capture. Few deer, he said, want to pose for four minutes at a time.

"I'm a landscape photographer. I enjoy seeing wildlife."

Moore, who is a trustee of the Shenandoah National Park Trust, will be at the MSV at 2 p.m. Aug. 12 to discuss his work and experiences. Following his talk, Moore will autograph copies of his book.

Bonnie Barr, museum store manager, said copies of Moore's book, in both soft- and hard-cover versions, will be on sale there.

Moore is pleased to have his photos on exhibit at MSV.

"Its a magnificent facility," he said, listing some of the many Valley items on display, from iron work to quilts and weaving.

Like the Shenandoah Valley, its national park namesake is also a very special location.

"It really is a wonderful place," Moore said. "The purpose of the book and the exhibit is to celebrate that."

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