



THE BULLETIN OF THE KING WILLIAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

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The Society's president wishes to apologize for the delay in the publication of this edition of the bulletin. At the risk of "whining," the president must confess that, for the past several months, the completion of a Master's thesis has preempted duties in other areas of his life. In addition to this "May" bulletin, another bulletin will be released in October. So, in 1994 at least, the King William Historical Society will have two publications.

In conducting research, the president unearthed something which will interest those who were curious about his connections to King William prior to 1988, when he was elected as the Society's president. In 1782, one Will, a former slave of one Mrs. Ann Colvin, "late of the County of King William," petitioned the Virginia legislature for the freedom granted him by Mrs. Colvin's will. This is an interesting find, but any connection between Mrs. Ann Colvin and the Society's president is doubtful. The Society's president is descended from Mason Colvin, who was born in Culpeper County in 1760.

In 1993 the King William County Historical Society lost two long-term members, Alonzo Thomas Dill and Ivy Lipscomb Sweet. Mr. Dill died on 19 July, and Mrs. Sweet departed this life on 23 December. Mrs. Sweet was a charter member of the Society, and served as treasurer for a few years. Before the formation of the King William Historical Society, Mrs. Sweet was active in maintaining the grounds around Acquinton Church, where her grandparents were buried. For many years Mrs. Sweet taught the Primary class of the Sharon Baptist Church Sunday School. The Society's president received his first Bible from Mrs. Sweet.

Alonzo, or "Lon," Dill, a North Carolinian, became director of publications for the Chesapeake Corporation in 1958. Dill's interest in his surroundings encouraged him to write *Carter Braxton: Virginia Signer and York River Yesterdays*. Dill also wrote a business history of the Chesapeake Corporation, and he was a former president of the Old St. John's Church Restoration Association.

Through the generosity of Mr. James Newman, owner of Wakema Farm, the King William County Historical Society met at Wakema on Sunday, 3 October 1993, at three o'clock in the afternoon. Wakema, on the Mattaponi River, encompasses the site of Frazer's Ferry, where one William Frazer operated a river crossing prior to the Revolutionary War. The following sketch of the activities of William Frazer and of subsequent owners of Frazer's crossing was prepared by Steve Colvin.

In April 1992 the King William County Historical Society sponsored a trip to Bacon's Castle and to Smith's Fort Plantation, in Surry County. Society members who accompanied the executive board on this excursion will remember that the group crossed the James River aboard the Scotland Ferry, near Jamestown. The ferry boat, called the "Virginia," had a capacity of more than two dozen motor vehicles. Chest-high railings and heavy steel chains on the ferry's gate gave assurance that no one would be tossed into the river. Motorists had the option

of staying in their vehicles or of walking at will among other passengers. A short flight of steps provided access to the observation deck, where rest rooms were available.

This image of a safe, comfortable river vessel is the conception most modern travelers associate with the word "ferry." It is perhaps difficult to imagine a flat-bottomed wooden boat, probably rectangular or square-shaped, with a lip of no more than six to eight inches which enclosed the area of the boat. At best the boat could accommodate one carriage and its driver and passengers, which were borne across the river by the rowing power of one or two ferrymen who were on duty "from sunne rising to sunne setting."¹ The trip across most of Virginia's rivers cost no more than ten cents. For more than 150 years such a crossing was maintained at Frazer's Ferry.

Few areas in seventeenth century Virginia were not accessible by water. As early as 1641 the general assembly provided for the "regulation and settlement of ferries" for the "ease of travellers," for "dispatch of public expresses, for the speedy transporting of forces over rivers and creeks in time of danger," and for "the benefit of travellers in business."² For the comfort of travelers, ferry keepers were allowed "to keep ordinary," where tired bodies could be rejuvenated by food, drink, and a night's lodging. One of the earliest ferries established in King William County was authorized by the Virginia government in 1705, at a place called Spencer's, where a man crossed for six cents; a man and his horse crossed for twelve cents, or one shilling.³

For fifty years before its formation in 1701 King William County had been a part of the county of New Kent. This area had been Virginia's first frontier, and it is certain that settlers in what was considered a forested wilderness established points for crossing the Mattaponi River. By "letters patent bearing date" December 1662, Captain Roger Mallory was granted 2500 acres of land in New Kent County, "on the south side of the Mattaponi River," in "the parish of St. John." The tract was "naturally bounded by old marsh beds" and by "sunken marsh and sunken grounds" along the river. Captain Mallory was not seated on his property until 1688, when a deed was recorded with a reference to the "Cliffs Landing." The "cliffs" were part of a high bank which formed a natural boundary for Mallory's property. The "cliffs landing" was probably a break in the riverbank used by Mallory as his outlet.

In March 1759 one William Frazer purchased 900 acres of the land patented nearly a hundred years earlier by Captain Mallory. It is probable that Frazer acquired the "Cliffs Landing" in this transaction. In October 1764 the Virginia government acknowledged that William Frazer had "lately raised a causey through the marsh opposite to his plantation," from which a public ferry was established by act of the legislature. Frazer charged six cents for a man and his horse, and he was allowed to keep an ordinary.⁴

Like every landowner in colonial King William, William Frazer cultivated tobacco, the staple of the colonial economy. Laws preventing the export of "bad and trash tobacco" were

established early. By 1730 these restrictions were no longer effective in regulating tobacco quality. Public warehouses were established for the inspection of tobacco "at or near the heads of the rivers and creeks." Warehouses were built on the Mattaponi River by William Aylett and John Quarles. These inspection stations occupied one acre of land, and owners were allowed four shillings per year for "every hogshead of tobacco received, inspected, and delivered" from a warehouse. The owners were expected to construct a brick square, "or funnel, six feet high at least, and four feet in diameter, with a proper arch at the bottom for burning tobacco refused and picked" at a warehouse.⁵

For more than forty years the warehouse constructed by John Quarles served as an inspection station for tobacco. The onset of the American Revolution "greatly obstructed trade" in Virginia. The question of tobacco quality became secondary to keeping track of quantities of tobacco shipped. With the "intent that a just quantity of tobacco exported may be more exactly known," the Virginia legislature revived inspection stations which had ceased to operated.⁶

By 1776 the warehouse called "Quarles" had been deemed "improperly placed, both to the public convenience and to vessels receiving tobacco from "the warehouse. William Frazer considered the "fine wharf and landing" at his ferry a more convenient place for a warehouse. Further more, the Virginia government had recently authorized its naval commissioners to provide for the construction of two frigates to carry thirty-two guns each, and "four large galleys fit for river or sea service, to be mounted with proper cannon." These ships would constitute the "Virginia fleet" empowered with the defense of the Virginia Coast. William Frazer petitioned the government for permission to relocate the "Quarles" station on his property. Frazer suggested that such a move would enable him "to store the rigging and sails of the public armed vessels, when and where they come to heave down and refit."⁷ *Frazer's petition was granted, and in 1780 his warehouse replaced "Quarles" as a inspection station.*⁸ Frazer's service to the "Virginia fleet" has been confirmed by local tradition.

William Frazer had been a loyal servant to the people of King William County. After his death in 1791, however, his sons wasted no time in disposing of his property. By 1802 Frazer's Ferry and 250 acres of land had become the property of Thomas R. Evans, whose wife had been a granddaughter of William Frazer. The ferry spanned a half-mile of water, and "from its particular situation," the ferry boat was "very much exposed to the wind, particularly in the winter season." Evans was obliged to keep "two able bodied men for the purpose of attending" the ferry, and he felt the charge of eight cents for a man, "and the same for a horse," did not reimburse him for his trouble. With the backing of thirty-eight neighbors Evans petitioned the state legislature to increase the rate of ferriage to ten and one-half cents for a man and the same for a horse. For every coach, wagon, chariot, and the driver, Evans begged leave to charge as for six horses. His petition was granted.⁹

Thomas R. Evans occupied a position of respect in King William. He was elected as a gentleman justice, a position which included the responsibility for governing the county and for providing for the common good from the county "levy," a tax of all free persons over the age of majority. In 1812 Thomas R. Evans paid taxes on five slaves, one "chair," and "two ferry men." He derived an income of \$250 from his ferry. This was a reasonable income, at a time when the clerk of the county court received a salary of \$100 a year. Evans' house was valued at \$300, and he paid taxes on one mahogany bookcase.¹⁰

Thomas R. Evans had died by 1825. The Frazer's Ferry tract descended to his son, Thomas J. Evans, who held the property until 1842. In that year the ferry and its adjoining acreage were purchased by Roger Gregory, of "Elsing Green." Gregory, a wealthy planter, acquired 173 1/2 acres on the Mattaponi River, worth \$2107. Fifty-five acres of marshland valued at \$58 came with the bargain. By 1842 the ferry included thirty-five acres on the King and Queen side of the river. A building on the larger tract, probably the former house of Thomas R. Evans, was

appraised at \$500 when Gregory took possession.¹¹

Roger Gregory died eight years after his acquisition of Frazer's Ferry. The property was inherited by his son, Dr. Junius Claiborne Gregory, who remained at "Elsing Green" until his marriage. In 1859 tolls at the ferry brought Junius Gregory \$200. In the next year Gregory's ferry income was \$250, and he paid taxes on one pleasure carriage and on a horse worth \$100. In 1860 Gregory's farmland at Frazer's Ferry was valued at \$2000. One hundred acres of cropland supported a family of six slaves who employed two working oxen in producing 300 bushels of Indian corn and two tons of hay.¹²

Junius Gregory sold Frazer's Ferry to his brother, William Gregory, in 1867. At that time the old house of Thomas R. Evans had dropped in value to \$200. Though no records exist to substantiate this theory, it may be assumed that the house had been damaged in 1863, when the cliffs at Frazer's Ferry had been used in the defense of the Mattaponi during a Federal raid which destroyed most of the village of Aylett. Federal gunboats shelled the countryside on both sides of the river, and it is likely that any building in the path of enemy fire was subjected to ruin.¹³

Philip Gibson, a native of King and Queen county, had been a veteran of the Civil War. According to his obituary, Gibson had been captured at Yellow Tavern and had been "for a long time held as a prisoner of war." After the war Gibson had made money "in the mercantile and lumber business."¹⁴ In 1871 he purchased Frazer's Ferry, and repaired the old house built by Thomas R. Evans. Gibson married Kate Neale and represented King William County in the Virginia House of Delegates.¹⁵

Kate Gibson's half sister Alice married William P. Bray, a business partner of Philip Gibson. Gibson and Bray purchased large tracts of timber. Among their holdings was a place called "Mount Airy," near West Point. In 1893 the two men contracted for the sale of all "original growth pine trees" at "Mount Airy."¹⁶

Philip Gibson owned Frazer's Ferry for eighteen years. He sold the property to William Bray in 1889 for \$6000. Six years later Gibson moved to Richmond, and he and Mrs. Gibson adopted the custom of spending the winter months in Florida.¹⁷

In 1886 William Bray established a post office called "Wakema" at Frazer's Ferry. It has been said that the name is Indian, however, regardless of its origin, "Wakema" became the place-name for the old ferry site. William Bray operated the postoffice until 1927, in his store at Wakema. During the 1890's Bray's store offered goods from Baltimore, brought by boat to Frazer's landing. Lavinia Sutherland Littlepage, a teen-ager during these years, recalled spending an entire day travelling the ten miles between her home and the Wakema store, where she could select fabric from the latest yard goods popular in cosmopolitan Baltimore.¹⁸

William Bray left "Wakema" to his only son, J. Brantley Bray, a prominent farmer and lumberman. The younger Bray attended the University of Richmond and served on the King William County board of supervisors. He was elected to the House of Delegates in 1927, and served for five years. His weight of 300 pounds, or better, became his trademark. Bray's burden of flesh probably triggered his sudden death, from heart failure, in January 1936. He died at "Wakeman" at the age of fifty-two. Bray's wife, Lucy Bray, was the last occupant of the "Wakema" house before its rejuvenation by James Newman.

1 William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large . . . of All the Laws of Virginia* (13 volumes, Richmond, Philadelphia, etc., 1809|1823), I, 269.

2 *Ibid.*, III, 218.

3 *Ibid.*, 219, 471.

4 *Ibid.*, VIII, 49. Land Patent Book 7, 660; 33, 547 (Microfilm Collection, Virginia State Library, Richmond). Personal Property Tax Lists, 1782-1832, King William County, Virginia (Microfilm Collection, Virginia State Library).

5 Hening, ed., *Statutes*, IX, 490.

6 *Ibid.*, 482, 575.

7 *Ibid.*, 196; Volume X, 379. Petition of William Frazer to the General Assembly of Virginia, 17 November 1777 (Archives Division, Virginia State Library).

8 Hening, ed., *Statutes*, X, 475.

9 Petition of Thomas R. Evans to the General Assembly of Virginia, 8 December 1802 (Archives, Virginia State Library). Samuel Shepherd, ed., *Statutes at Large of Virginia*, Volume II, 420. Evans' petition was approved on 5 January 1803.

- 9 Petition of Thomas R. Evans to the General Assembly of Virginia, 8 December 1802 (Archives, Virginia State Library).
Samuel Shepherd, ed., *Statutes at Large of Virginia*, Volume II, 420. Evans' petition was approved on 5 January 1803.
- 10 Personal Property Tax List, 1812 (Microfilm, Virginia State Library).
- 11 Land Tax Books, King William County, 1812-1848 (Microfilm, Virginia State Library).
- 12 Personal Property Tax Lists, 1859-1863, King William County (Microfilm, Virginia State Library).
1860 United States Census, King William County, Agricultural and Slave Schedules (Microfilm, Virginia State Library).
- 13 Land Tax Books, 1865-1870, King William County (Archives Division, Virginia State Library).
- 14 Obituary, Philip Gibson, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 29 March 1904, 7 (Microfilm Collection, Virginia State Library).
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Land Tax Books, 1872, 1872, King William County (Archives Division, Virginia State Library).
- 17 King William County Deed Book 11, 223, King William Courthouse.
- 18 King William County Deed Book 7, 304; Obituary, Philip Gibson.
- 19 Conversations with Thomas T. H. Hill and Mrs. William G. Stigall.
- 19 Obituary, J. Brantley Bray, *Richmond News Leader*, 15 January 1936 (Microfilm Collection, Virginia State Library).
Conversations with Mrs. Annie Page Russ and Miss Mary Anna Billups.

Sisters

As one might suspect, the title of this sketch was inspired by the critically acclaimed television series, "Sisters," based on the lives of four sisters who, from childhood to adulthood, have nurtured each other through life's joys and sorrows.

The special bond which often exists between sisters has inspired writers for generations. One can't help but recall the Alcott sisters of Concord, the Grimké sisters of Charleston, or the Brontë sisters of Great Britain, who were writers themselves. On a local level, one may recall the seven "Misses Ryland" of "Roseville," the Misses Elizabeth and Rosa Latané of "Glanvilla," or the Misses Anna and Mary Burnley Gwathmey of "Burlington," all products of the nineteenth century. This list would be incomplete without mention of the seven Pollard sisters who lived at "Octagon," near Aylett.

The Pollard women, Ellen Douglas, Sarah Adams, Anna Stuart, Lelia Shield, Maria Spotswood, Elizabeth Russel, and Rosalie Dandridge Pollard, were part of the sixteen offspring produced by the marriage of James Otway Pollard and George Anna Smith. In the early 1840s George Anna and Sarah Adams Smith, natives of Westmoreland County, had come to King William to



James Otway Pollard
*Photo courtesy of
George Dandridge Pollard
Martinsville, VA*

James Otway Pollard, of "Octagon." The Pollard brothers would inherit these homes from their father, Robert Pollard, at his death in 1856. Dr. William George Pollard would inherit 400 acres at "Edge Hill." James Otway Pollard would inherit only 100 acres from his father, yet he would assume his father's position as clerk of the county court of King William, a job which after 1860 would fetch an annual salary of \$200.

Before the Civil War, James Otway Pollard had executed a promissary note to one F. R. Burke. In order to meet his obligations, Pollard had borrowed money from his brother, William Dandridge Pollard, who had received "Octagon" in a deed of trust. James Otway Pollard died before settling Burke's note, which had been reassigned to one Alexander Dudley. When Dudley took the matter to court, William Dandridge Pollard had been obliged to sell "Octagon" at auction, in 1875. James Otway Pollard's son, Otway Byrd Pollard, had made money in the sawmill business after his removal to Hanover County. At the sale of "Octagon," Otway Byrd Pollard purchased the place for \$300.¹ George Anna Pollard and her daughters were assured of a home.

The first death among George Anna Pollard's adult children came in April 1890, when Lelia Pollard dies with liver disease.² Later in that year Mrs. Pollard's daughters Anna and Maria Spotswood Pollard bought "Octagon" from their brother. Both Anna and Maria Pollard had died by August 1909. Since neither of the Pollard ladies left a will, "Octagon" descended to their mother and their five siblings, Otway Byrd, Robert, Sarah, Rosalie, and Mrs. Ellen Meech. George Anna's son John and her daughter, Elizabeth (Pollard) Epps, had died by this time. Otway Byrd Pollard and Mrs. Meech would be dead when their mother wrote a will in January 1911. When George Anna Pollard died in 1915, her dower rights to "Octagon" descended to her daughters Sarah Adams and Rosalie Dandridge Pollard.³

At the time of George Anna Pollard's death the farmland at "Octagon" was rented to one R. L. Rice. This arrangement continued after the place was inherited by Sarah and Rosalie Pollard. In 1921 the sisters leased "Octagon" to Rice for their lifetimes. Sarah and Rosalie agreed to furnish room and board for Rice as long as he remained single. Rice was to work "Octagon" in a "proper manner and in a proper rotation," which would include applying "all the manure possible." The Pollard sisters were to have one fourth of all crops raised, as rent. Rice agreed to "cut up and put in place a plenty of firewood" for the use of the Pollard ladies. The diligent tenant also promised to "furnish all seed and labor" and to "care for the animals kept by said Rosalie D. and S. A. Pollard."⁴

For Rice's careful attention to the terms set down by the Pollard sisters for their care during their old age, Rice was granted the option to buy "Octagon" from the longest living sister. This seemed a fair bargain for two maiden laides who were growing older with no family to see to their needs. Shortly after this agreement was drawn up, Sarah Adams Pollard developed a heart condition which claimed her life on 23 April 1924. Miss Pollard had been among the first offspring produced by James Otway Pollard and George Anna Smith, and she had lived seventy-six years.⁵ It may be assumed that the faithful Mr. Rice stayed on at "Octagon" for as long as he was needed by Rosalie Dandridge Pollard. It is certain that Rice never exercised his option to buy the Pollard farm. After Miss Rosalie was left alone, her niece, Norma (Meech) Gibbs, came to live at "Octagon." Miss Pollard lived until 1956, when she died at the age of ninety-two. She was buried with her family in the Pollard burying ground at "Mount Zoar." "Octagon" descended to the son of Miss Rosalie's brother, Robert Pollard.

- 1 King William County Deed Book 9, 228. (Original deed 16 January 1875).
- 2 Register of Deaths, King William County, Virginia, 1853-1896. (Microfilm Collection, Virginia State Library).
- 3 Will of George Anna Pollard, King William County WB2,95.
- 4 Contract, 20 September 1921, between R. L. Rice and Rosalie D. and S. A. Pollard, recorded in Miscellaneous Record Book ML-1-48, King William Courthouse.
- 5 Death Certificate, Sarah Adams Pollard, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Richmond, Virginia.

teach school Sarah would marry Dr. William George Pollard of "Edge Hill," and George Anna would marry Dr. Pollard's brother,

