

King William County Historical Society Newsletter

January 2012

From Our President

The 2011 year proved to be a busy one for the Society.

Four membership meetings were held:

- January - Bob Gray, Acting Pamunkey Tribe Chief
- May - Visit to Wyoming, home of Dorothy Atkinson, local historian
- July - Picnic at Windsor Shades, home of Carl and Lynn Fischer
- October - Visit Valentine Richmond History Center

Your Board met almost monthly accomplishing many things. Insurance quotes were obtained and we stayed with the current carrier. A light and an electrical outlet were placed on a pole at Acquinton Church. The King William fourth graders toured the Museum on May 9-11. On May 28 the first wedding in many years was held at Acquinton Church. Our intern, Josh Dougherty, assisted us with our oral history project and cemetery documentation. We responded to many requests for historic information.

A new roof was placed on the old court house jail by the County. They agreed to lease the jail to the Society if we could raise the funds to repair the jail (see below). Note cards of the Old Courthouse and Acquinton Church were made available for sale. The first draft of a new brochure was reviewed. In November a decision was made to replace the Society's and Museum's computers in 2012. Rebecca Townsend was appointed Chairperson for the Museum Council.

I wish you a Happy New Year and hope one of your resolutions will be to become active in the affairs of the Society and Museum. *Carl Fischer*

January Society Meeting

**“Feeling the Power”
A Sampling of Treasures
From**

The Library of Virginia's Special Collections

The Commonwealth of Virginia Library, established in 1823, is extraordinarily rich in its holdings. Some of its most dazzling items are housed in the Library's Special Collections department. Tom Camden, director of that department, will talk about the collection, sharing his own passionate interest in materials while also dazzling his audience with a few of the treasures of the Commonwealth. Please join us at 2:30 p.m. on January 22 at the County Administration Building for a most entertaining program. *Adele Smith*

Jail Fund Raising Project

It is the goal of the Society to have the jail in the old courthouse complex available for occupancy by summer 2012. We are grateful for donations which total \$4,603 to date. We applied for four grants and have heard from one foundation which granted us \$10,000. We are continuing to receive donations which hopefully will bring us to our goal.

In addition to your financial support, you can help in many ways. We will be looking for people to serve on a committee to work with the County in coordinating repairs. If you know of tradespeople who might provide materials and labor free or at a reduced cost please let us know. We might put you to work cleaning or painting. (*Contact Carl Fischer Tel. 843-9194*)

News from the Museum

WANTED VOLUNTEERS

For the King William Historical Museum

Free training sessions included

For more information call 804-769-2318

The Museum Council

which consists of

members of the community

as well as

the King William County Historical Society

will meet on

Sunday, January 15, 2012 at 3:00 PM

for the purpose of setting up goals for the year

Your input is welcome!

Five volunteers participated in a Christmas Sale of gift shop merchandise during December. We sold in excess of \$350.00 worth of merchandise first at a local bazaar, then during the week at the shop. This allowed county employees the opportunity to visit the museum, as well as take advantage of two days of discounted prices. We welcome suggestions that will allow us to better serve the larger community. Thanks! *Rebecca Townsend*

October Meeting Report: The Valentines of King William

The Valentine Richmond History Center, former home of Mann Satterwhite Valentine, Jr. has a very definite connection to our county even though he wasn't born here. His father, grandfather, and great grandfather were all from King William County.

The great grandfather, Jacob, was deeded land in St. David's Parish in 1754. He was a tobacco farmer who was stout, and had no wrinkles on his face. He served in the Revolutionary Army and was engaged in sending boats down the Pamunkey River when news of Yorktown reached him. He lost an eye in service. Jacob was married twice his first wife being Sarah Batchelder of Middlesex County. They had seven children. His second wife was Mary Elizabeth,

widow of Samuel Batchelder. They had two children.

Batchelder Valentine, the second son of Jacob and Sarah, was a dignified gentleman who was also rather stout. He was a planter and lived at High Hill on the road from Acquinton to Brandywine, now Manquin, and was within a mile of Fountainebleau. It was one of the College lots owned by William and Mary College. In 1833, the property was conveyed to Young Clements, and later sold to Fountainbleau. He was a planter and good friend of the Roane family who lived nearby. He married Anne Satterwhite of York County and they had five children including Mann, Sr.

Mann was born at High Hill, the property now a part of Fontainebleau, and educated in the schools of Westey and King. He moved to Richmond in 1806 and read law in the office of Samuel McGraw. He lived in Mr. McGraw's office, kept his accounts, memorandum and practical business. Mr. McGraw got him an appointment at the Armory. He was an ensign in the state guard. Mann left law and turned to commerce when his father's fortune was seriously impaired through payment of large security debts. Gov. Cabell gave him the office of lieutenant in the Public Guard and keeping of the Penitentiary Store. He left that position and founded Valentine, Breeden and Company, the largest dry good store in Richmond. He was very successful and was the first native to successfully compete with English merchants. Mann was a lover of nature and the arts. Later, he became an ardent sympathizer of the South and was a contributor to the cause. He literally died of a broken heart in 1865. Mann married Elizabeth Moody of Henrico and had nine children, two of which became a poet and an artist. He was disappointed that none of his sons had an interest in entering the family business.

He bought the house that is now the Richmond History Center in 1880, having gone to college for one year but returned home when his father died. He ran the store and supported his siblings and

encouraged them in their endeavors. When his wife became gravely ill in her 50's, her doctor recommended that she be fed concentrated beef broth to revive her. This was the practice of the day.

Others heard about this, so Mann began producing meat juice, sold not only in this country but also in Europe. The business was located in Richmond and known as Valentine's Meat Juice Company. It went out of business in 1986. Both his financial success and his wife's inherited wealth gave him the means to bequeath his home, the former home of John Wickham, to become the Valentine Museum. *Adele Smith*

From the Editor

We want to make our newsletters more interesting for our membership. We are beginning a series of history articles about families and home sites in King William. If you are willing to write an article or just give information to me, I will write it. Contact me at 804-769-2138 or wguyemilie@wildblue.net. See our first article submitted by Aldwin Hight of Lynchburg, VA. We are indeed grateful for our first article. *Emilie Townsend*

James Mordecai Abrams Family



James Mordecai Abrams as a boy

The earliest Abrams forebear is identified as Mordecai Abraham, born about 1735 in Central Europe and emigrated first to London and then eventually to King William County, Virginia. He served as a captain in the Revolutionary War and was present at the Battle of Yorktown.

As early as 1790, the *Virginia Gazette* carried notices about his dealing in stock on his farm in King William County. He owned land in both King and Queen and King William County, and he and his wife Sarah were the parents of children whose progeny have today spread across the county.

To move quickly, however, to his King William descendant and namesake, James Mordecai Abraham (1854-1921), is to look at the history of the county in the last half of the nineteenth-century and the first couple of decades of the twentieth. Mary Thomas Abrams Smith, the daughter of his younger brother William, recalled her uncle and told anecdotes about him. She continued to live at the Abrams home place until shortly before her death at the age of ninety-nine in September, 2011. James Mordecai Abraham had died by the time Edna Davis married his youngest son, Wiley Abrams, in 1937, but Edna, now Edna Richardson, continues to live in her father-in-law's home on what was once his farm. Two of her sons, grandsons of James Mordecai Abraham, Wiley Abrams and Jim Abrams, live on a portion of their grandfather's farm. Jackie Broaddus Abrams, widow of his grandson Bob Abrams, lives nearby. Bob Abrams, informally nicknamed the "Mayor of Manquin," was an encyclopedia of Abrams family lore. Connie Hughes Abrams, widow of grandson Roger Eugene Abrams, lives across from the old Abrams farm. Grandson Kenneth Wayne Abrams lives in New Kent County, and grandsons Thomas Hundley and Mahon Abrams, sons of Roger Abrams, live in Mathews. This includes only those descendants with the surname Abrams.

There is sometimes confusion over the spelling of the surname. At some point in the first decades of the twentieth century, someone in James Mordecai Abraham's family began to lobby the family to change its surname to Abrams, and the family was gradually won over. This transition

can be seen on the May, 1916, Venter High School diploma of the next-to-the-youngest daughter in the family where her name is listed on her diploma as "Moeller Abrams," but her father, as a member of the school board, signs his name on the diploma as "J.M. Abraham."

James Mordecai Abraham's life was a shining example of the *pater familias* of rural Virginia at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century Virginia. His son, Mack Abrams, recalled that his father had been a boy of just ten or twelve when his father died. His father had been a huckster, had taken vegetables and produce from King William into Richmond to sell. When his father died, some gentlemen from Richmond came to see his widow and told her that if the oldest boy could bring in the produce, they would see that it was sold. The young J. M. Abraham drove the wagon into Richmond, leaving early in the morning and getting there late in the evening. Friends of his father took care of him. He spent the night in town and returned to King William the next day.

My mother, Lucille Floyd Hight, the daughter of his oldest child, Minnie Leigh Abrams Floyd, used to marvel at her grandfather's business acumen. By the time she knew him, he was the owner of a six hundred acre farm, and a fine, well-built house on what is now the Venter Road. He purchased the farm, Blakes, for his sons Sam, Mack (Thomas McKendree) and Mort (Mordecai, the last of the King William Abrams to carry this historic name). He was one of the founders of McKendree Methodist Church where he was an active member. He and his wife Martha ("Mattie") were the parents of twelve children, all of whom, except one, survived to be adults.

In 1980, less than a year before she died, my mother recalled happy days with her Grandfather and Grandmother Abrams:

"Grandpa Abrams was of medium height, had auburn hair and beard. He must have been a good manager to have accumulated all the property. Grandma was short and stocky and always wore a shirt waist, a blouse we would call it and a skirt and apron. On Sundays after church, we would go to our grandparents, one Sunday to my father's family, and the next Sunday to Grandpa and

Grandma Abrams's where there were always lots of people. Since Grandpa was on the school board, there would sometimes be teachers who boarded there.

A big table which would seat twelve was in the dining room, and Grandpa and Grandma sat at the ends. There were benches along the sides for others. We children usually had to wait for the second table. In the summer an African-American boy named Judge Butler would stand in the dining room while we ate and wave a peach branch over the table to keep the flies away. Most Sundays after dinner, we would go into the living room and stand around the piano or organ and sing. Bella or Elizabeth would play. We would sing hymns or popular songs like 'Sweet Adeline' or 'Carolina Moon.'

In the winter there would be skating on the ice pond by the Old Mill where blocks of ice were also cut for the ice house. Both Mack and Mort had built two horse sleighs, and we rode in these when there was snow on the ground.

One of Grandpa Abrams money crops was sweet potatoes, and in the spring he would pay me to drop potato plants. When the potatoes were dug, he would ship them from the wharf at Aylett by boat to Baltimore. (Mary Thomas Abrams Smith used to chuckle when she recalled one of the teachers who boarded with her Uncle Mordecai Abrams saying that he had never eaten as many sweet potatoes in his life.)

There was not a regular cook, but different African-American women would help, particularly Aunt Peachy Taylor. She also helped with the washing and other household work. When anyone was married, Aunt Peachy would make a pound cake for the new couple.

"Grandma was a good nurse. Whenever any of Dr. Hawes Campbell's family was sick, he would call on her to help him. She was at our house nursing some of us who were sick with the flu when Grandpa Abrams died suddenly with a heart attack, Nov. 4, 1921." *Aldwin Hight*

New Members

In 2011 we welcomed 15 new Historical Society members. Our “world wide web” continues to attract out-of-state members who claim ancestors from King William County. This year 80% of our new members resided outside of King William County. Since October’s report, we have had three new members join – James Alexander of Richmond, Susan Whitt of Ashland (Harry Whitt’s sister) and Warren Roberts of Maplewood, MN, *Robert Hubbard*

Our Website

Our website provides information about the history of King William County and current information about the society’s projects, activities and publications. Carl Fischer has recently volunteered to update information ensuring our members are up-to-date. Please visit our website at www.kingwilliamhistory.org. Suggestions on additional information to be added to our website are welcomed. *Robert Hubbard*

Historic and Architectural Review Board

This County board is responsible for administrating the requirements of the County’s code related to historic districts. It can also propose the establishment of additional historic districts. Three members of the Society currently serve on the Board. A proposal will be made to the Board of Supervisors to increase the membership on this Board. Let Ruth Armatage or Carl Fischer know if you are interested in serving. They can advise you as to when you should apply for membership. *Carl Fischer*

Newsletter Subscriptions

If any of you who receive your newsletter through the postal service happen to have an email address we could use instead, please contact Emilie Townsend, 804-769-2138. Email: wguyemilie@wildblue.net. Every little saving helps your society. Thank you. *Emilie Townsend*