

King William County Historical Society Newsletter

April 2012

From Our President

Your Board of Directors has met on a regular basis over the winter and I would like to update you on several matters.

Board Elections – You will see a slate of board members in this newsletter that will be voted on in July. They are elected for a two year term and must rotate off after two terms. As a result there are four new names on the slate. A special thanks to Ruth Childress for chairing the Nominating Committee.

Jail Renovation - We are currently waiting for the County to lease the jail to us so we can begin renovations. The lease should be completed in April or May. We are currently gathering estimates for major costs. The Board appointed a committee to oversee the project. They are: Carl Fischer, Eugene Campbell, Bob Hubbard, Trent Funkhouser, and Herb White. I am pleased to report that we recently received a \$5,000 grant from the Elis Olsson Foundation.

Acquinton Church - Rules and regulations regarding the use of Acquinton Church were recently approved by the Board. The rental fee is \$200 and the applicant must provide a portable toilet. There is no electrical service, but an extension cord can be run from the pole for a microphone. As you know, one wedding was held there last year.

Oral Histories - We are continuing to record oral histories. Our April membership meeting will be dedicated to oral history live presentations. It should be a great time to learn firsthand about county history. I am sorry a family commitment will not allow me to attend. *Carl Fischer*

January Meeting Report:

The King William County Historical Society met on Sunday, Jan. 22, at the County Administration

Building. After a brief business meeting conducted by President Carl Fischer, Vice President Adele Smith introduced our program speaker, Tom Camden, Curator of Special Collections at the Library of Virginia. Educated in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, he received his undergraduate degree from Washington and Lee and his graduate degrees from the University of Tennessee. His career has taken him from the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord, NH, to the Civil War Center at the University of Georgia in Athens, GA to the George C. Marshall Library at VMI in Lexington, VA and lastly to his current job in Richmond.

We were in for a treat. Not only is Mr. Camden knowledgeable but his mix of humor with history is mesmerizing. He brought treasures!! Noting a few highlights of his program, we saw Cornwallis' signed parole papers written in haste at Yorktown and George Mason's first draft of the Bill of Rights. He showed us how Thomas Jefferson's books are identified as his own, and as he held Patrick Henry's book, he commented, "Can you feel the power?" Another treasure was Stonewall Jackson's last dispatch to Gen. Lee in 1863 which he delivered only 3 hours before he was killed. As a side comment he noted that General Lee's statue on Monument Avenue which has recently undergone a major restoration project is owned by the state. All the others are the property of the City of Richmond, which does not have the monies or interest in keeping them in good shape.

From the remarkable collection of 53 letters sent to Jefferson Davis from Robert E. Lee (a gift to the Library of Virginia from Wall Street financier and South Carolina native, Bernard Baruch) to a letter written by a Confederate veteran asking the state of Virginia to grant him a larger pension due to his war injuries (bullet included), Mr. Camden showed the variety of items in the Special Collections. His last display was a book written in raised script by the

students at the Virginia School for the Blind, Deaf, and Dumb in Staunton, VA for a favorite teacher who was leaving the school.

He had promised us that we would be dazzled, and we definitely were! *Adele Smith*

April Meeting Notice

Our society has begun recording oral histories. County residents are being interviewed, and the interviews are being recorded to be transcribed and saved. We hope to capture memories from our most valuable resources – ourselves!

On April 15th long time county residents have agreed to be on a panel. Mrs. Dorothy Martin Walker Krewatch, Mrs. Elizabeth McAlister, and Mr. B. W. White have agreed to answer a few questions about life in King William County. It will be an opportunity to observe our oral history project in person. Hopefully it will jog memories that you might want to share or remind you of someone whose memories we might want to record. Please plan on joining us for what appears to be a delightful walk through the history of the county.

The meeting will begin at 2:30 pm, Sunday, April 15 at the King William Administration Building at the courthouse. If you have any questions that you would like presented to the panel, please contact Adele Smith at 769-1960. *Adele Smith*

Chestnut Grove – A Short History



Chestnut Grove has been a farm from the year 1795. I believe this because my father, W. Lynn Thomas said so, and he did more research in the

matter than I have. He did append “circa” to the date.

The farm initially was part of a land grant to the College of William and Mary, farmers paid rent with which the college supported itself. In 1831 and 1846 the Trustees of William and Mary sold three “tenements” to Thomas Pollard who was my great, great grandfather. I assume the Trustees decided that they could generate more support for the college by investing money than they could by collecting rents.

Thomas Pollard was born at Chestnut Grove in 1796 the youngest child of a second marriage. His half brothers included William of Marl Hill, Henry of Hanover County, Robert, clerk of the county court, Joseph, and one half sister. During his lifetime he farmed approximately 300 acres which is the present size of the place. Pollard’s half sister when she became a widow came to live at Chestnut Grove until her death at 90, bringing her slaves with her. The slave census of 1840 listed ten African American slaves on the place as well as a few free African Americans. Among the slaves were George Banks and his two sisters, Lucy and Rachael Banks.

Thomas Pollard married Mary Smith, the daughter of Henry (Harry) Smith and Wealthy Oliver, who lived at Chestnut Grove until their deaths at 86 and 85. Wealthy Oliver was a noted beauty; suitors rode horseback more than 40 miles to pay her a call.

Thomas and Mary had nine children, the youngest of whom was my great-grandfather Andrew Macon Pollard. Family lore has it that during the Civil War, Andrew Macon (then ten or twelve years old) had the assigned task of driving the livestock to the “old level” near Moncuin Creek when rumors spread that Union troops were nearby. On one occasion he returned to the house to learn that Federals had indeed come raiding. The enemy troopers had broken into the smokehouse and carried off hams and sides of bacon. However the Yankees had taken more than they cared to carry, and they hacked the meat with their sabers as they rode and dropped the meat in the dusty road. Andrew Macon’s mother dispatched the lad to follow the horsemen, collect their discarded spoil, and bring it home, where she washed the meat and rehung it in the smokehouse.

A little more than a century later the Yankees returned to Chestnut Grove. This time they were about 1000 members of the 82nd Airborne Division in maroon berets shouldering 60-pound packs on a training exercise. They marched almost 100 miles in three days a performance that ranks with Stonewall Jackson’s

“foot cavalry.” En route to the Richmond airport and flights back to Fort Bragg, they trudged right past Chestnut Gove on Route 605, Manfield Road. These Yankees were well-behaved; they stayed away from the smokehouse. One of the soldiers even left some food behind. After the troopers had passed by my father found a small 1.5 ounce olive-drab can labeled “Jam-Apricot.”

Almost 150 years ago Yankee cavalry came to Chestnut Grove and rode away with ham and bacon. About 114 years after that United States paratroopers marched past Chestnut Grove and left a little food behind. The Marshall Plan this was not, but I see this progression as promising. Perhaps the next time the Yanks come to Chestnut Grove, they will bring us chocolates and hand held digital devices!

The Pollards and Chestnut Grove survived the Civil War. After the war familial machinations ensued. Thomas Pollard sold the farm to his seven surviving children in 1867 and 1872. Somehow his son Eldred Rufus Pollard came to own the farm. He continued to farm and late in the 19th century founded a church there. He convened a meeting of the members of Epworth Methodist Church, who decided to establish a Methodist church closer to their home. McKendree Methodist Church began in the ground-floor dining room of Chestnut Grove, and members met there or under a brush-arbor on the place until the church building was completed in 1896,

“Uncle Rufus” died in 1904, and left the farm to his daughters, Clara Pollard and Bernice Pollard Hurst (then of Norfolk, Virginia), first cousins and dear childhood companions of my grandmother. These ladies rented the farm to the Parker family, and then in 1949 they sold it to my grandparents, Mary Pollard Thomas and Emory Howell Thomas.

My grandmother grew up on the farm with her cousins and loved the place. With them she attended school in the small building that still stands in the yard – along with the meat house that her father Andrew Macon Pollard restocked during the Civil War. My grandfather Emory Howell Thomas was not a farmer. Family lore has it that at age nineteen he came to the end of a cotton row on his parents’ farm near Hog Mountain, GA, put down his bag, and announced, “Mama, I will pick no more cotton ever.” He traveled to Richmond in

1900, met and married my grandmother, and with his brother Luther (who married my grandmother’s sister Grace Pollard) founded Thomas Brothers Furniture Company at Second and Marshall Streets in Richmond.

My father W. Lynn Thomas in time operated the furniture store and resided in Ginter Park in Richmond with my mother, Mary Morton Thomas, the daughter of a Richmond physician. But really my father lived at Chestnut Grove. He stabilized the house and lost a porch or two in the 1950s. I spent summers here as a boy, helping with the animals and picking vegetables and playing church league softball with Bobby Fox and others. With the help of “Miss Nanny” and Leonard Chenault who lived in a cottage on the farm, my father farmed and kept at various times horses, cattle, hogs, chickens, and sheep on the place. After he retired he bought a pony and taught riding to children from King’s Grant School.

Barns, sheds, stables, fences, and chicken houses have come and gone through the years. The house has undergone numerous transitions. It began as a one-over-one-over-one—three rooms. Then it took on a central hall plan with two-over-two. Every generation has undertaken renovations. My father installed central heat and moved the dining room and kitchen upstairs from the English basement and rearranged some other spaces in 1965 when he and my mother moved from Richmond permanently to Chestnut Grove.

After my father died in 1987 my mother lived alone on the farm for a couple of years, caring for her two beloved dogs, before moving to Westminster Canterbury in Richmond. My son John Taliaferro Thomas lived at Chestnut Grove for two years after graduating from college. During his stay he oversaw some significant repairs and renovation of the ground floor.

After the Chenaults died, their house eventually became the residence of the Thomas Tupponce family who enlarged and improved the house to make it home. In a sense my people (English colonists) took the land from his people (Native Americans) so it is only proper that he should live here. In 2007 Tom Tupponce of the Upper Mattaponi tribe was part of a delegation of Native Americans, the first such official native party since Pocahontas to travel to England as guests of the Crown during the Bicentennial of the founding of Jamestown.

Chestnut Grove is still a farm. Winter wheat, soybeans, and corn grow in the leased fields, and we watch the trees grow into timber. The place is the beloved second home for me and Frances (Fran) Taliaferro, my “first wife” (and only wife) since our marriage fifty years ago this August. We divide our time between Chestnut Grove and our home in Athens, Georgia where I taught Southern history for 35 years at the University of Georgia. Growing up our two sons spent many happy seasons at the farm. As adults Emory and John and their wives Laura and Janice and children have rallied here with us through the years for occasions large and small along with my brother-in-law Harry (Tuck) Taliaferro of Warsaw, Circuit Court judge of the Northern Neck, and our dear family friend Colleen Fisher, who feel at home here as well. Like the generations before us we have added new spaces and porches to the house that has become so special to grandchildren Marshall and Julia, Emily and Sam. Numerous dogs, several buried here now, have enriched our gatherings.

The chestnuts of Chestnut Grove died in the blight the early 20th century. Someone planted ash trees to replace them. We have tried to plant a tree in honor of each new member of the family.

As a family we feel very blessed to have entrusted to us this special place. We are now into the eighth generation of descendants of the colonists who began farming here. We enjoy sharing our farm with all sorts and conditions of people. As my father once said, this place is “a home place; not a show place.” *Dr. Emory M. Thomas.*

Membership and Proposed Dues Change

The Board of Directors would like to propose one change in “dues.” As it stands now, a lifetime single membership is \$250. If a couple wanted to be lifetime members, it would mean \$500. The board suggests we change the lifetime dues to: “A spouse can be added to a lifetime membership for \$50.” This will be an item on the agenda at the April meeting and the vote will be taken at the July meeting. Any member of the executive committee can be contacted for questions.

Please keep in mind the society’s fiscal year runs from July 1-June 30 and annual dues will be due in a couple of months. At the present, our dues structure is:

Individual....\$20	Family....\$30
Student....\$10	Lifetime ...\$250

Please send your check to:
King William County Historical Society
PO Box 233
King William, Virginia 23086
Carl Fischer

Nominating Committee Report 2012-2014

The Nominating Committee Report will be presented to the membership at the April meeting and voted on at the July meeting. The slate of officers has been accepted and approved by the Board of Directors. If anyone wants to make a nomination from the floor for an office, the nominee must have agreed to serve prior to nominating them. *Ruth Childress, Chairman, Nominating Committee*

President – Carl Fischer
Vice-President – Adele Smith
Corresponding Secretary – Audrey Mitchell
Recording Secretary – Marie Jennings
Treasurer – Robert Hubbard
Members-at-large – Herb White, Robert Moran, David White
Past-President and Historian - Lloyd Huckstep

New Members

Two new members joined the society during the first quarter of this year. Joe Topham Jr., of King William and Scott Lucchesi, Director of Community Development for King William County. *Bob Hubbard*

Cemetery Documentation

For several years the historical society has been documenting information on additional grave sites...with plans to produce an updated version of the society’s book “Old King William County Cemeteries” (last revised 1995). There were hundreds of additional graves identified for new or currently documented cemeteries. Most additional cemeteries were old family home sites.

We recently decided to abandon the plan to print a new book because of the cost and the fact additional grave sites continue to be identified or updated. Instead, we begun populating an existing online database repository with grave site information not already documented. We found the existing King William County information in the database to be very accurate, but incomplete.

Thanks to member Ron Parker, almost half of the missing grave information has been entered into the database. Ron volunteered to take on the tedious task of comparing our existing book with the database and then creating the missing cemeteries and entering grave information. At this writing, 18 new cemeteries have been created and almost 300 new graves added. We hope to have the project complete by June 2012. While incomplete, you may want to view our progress to date...the website is www.findagrave.com – enter search information for King William County. *Bob Hubbard*

King William County Historic Site Mapping

New technologies are allowing us to do more for less! Electronic mail allows us to have more communication while reducing postage significantly, and our new website continues to attract new members to the society and online data bases (like Find-a-Grave) allows easy, flexible, no cost access to historic information.

A new project we have initiated involves utilizing the existing King William County mapping system to do overlays of historic sites in the county. Sites can be identified by “911 addresses,” GPS quadrants or tax map ID. This means we can generate color mapping overlays of King William County showing historic districts, buildings, sites, markers, etc. Special interest groups could focus on locating churches or cemeteries or old post offices. The possibilities are endless and any combination of historic sites could be combined into a single map. *Bob Hubbard*

Finances

Expenses have been routine for the first quarter, but in May there may be a significant impact to our income. Most of our operating expenses for the

museum are paid for by interest earned in a CD established over four years ago – drawing over 4%. If renewed, we could expect around 1%. The board is looking for alternative investments which would carry more risk, but hopefully yield greater earnings. A proposal will be made to the membership in the near future. *Bob Hubbard*

Historic Preservation and Architectural Review Board (HPARB)

The county’s HPARB approves changes to property in historic districts. In the near future there will be two additional positions on this board. If you are interested in serving or learning more about the HPARB, contact Carl Fischer 804-843-9194,

Upcoming Event

King and Queen Historical Society Meeting will be held Sunday, April 22, 3:00PM at Bruington Baptist Church, 4784 The Trail, Bruington, VA. The speaker Michael Whitt, Special Project Assistant at Virginia Baptist Society. His subject is “Church Minutes as Source of Local History.”