

# King William County Historical Society Newsletter

January 1, 2014

## **From Our President**

This past year has been a very busy one for the King William County Historical Society. We began the year with the completion of the jail renovation. This new space provides a dedicated office and storage for the society as well as the museum. In addition, the renovated jail provides a meeting room and bathroom facilities.

Upon completion of the jail renovation, the remaining funds from that project were used to complete work on the outside of the old courthouse. After the masonry was repaired, the arcade and the trim on the exterior of the courthouse were painted.



*Images provided by Gene Campbell*

Working with county officials and Virginia's Department of Historic Resources, the society obtained a grant to do an architectural survey. The work was started in December to update eighty listed buildings and to identify forty new buildings to include

in the survey. This project will be completed by May 2014 and should be a great asset to the county for future preservation planning activities.

We appreciate your support of the society during 2013. As we look to 2014, our greatest need is for volunteers to support the museum. A small group has staffed the museum over the past five years and we need additional volunteers if we are to keep it open during 2014. Please consider volunteering to help by contacting Rebecca Townsend at 804 769 2318.

*Carl R. Fischer*  
President

## **Treasurer's Report**

We welcome the following new members in 2013:

Wilsonia Esteve (Lifetime) of Springfield, VA  
Sally Pearson of Walkerton, VA  
David and Marian Novak of Rockbridge Baths, VA  
Karen Elsken of Charlotte, NC  
Dorothy Kiger of Fort Worth, TX  
Michael Hill of Libertyville, IL

We still have a significant number of members who have not paid their dues for 2013. Remember that our fiscal year starts on July 1, so if you have not paid since then, please send your dues in as soon as possible.

Our Wells Fargo Investment Account is up about 4% for the year, which is well above CD rates. Our account consists of approx. 65% Common Stocks, 30% Mutual Funds and 5% Cash.

*Ron Parker*  
Treasurer

## **KWHS Membership Meeting October 20, 2013**

The King William County Historical Society met on October 20, 2013 at the King William Administration building at 2:30 p.m. Following a brief business meeting, members were treated to a special historical presentation by Mr. Jim Harris.

Mr. Harris is the son of the late Dr. Malcolm Harris. Dr Harris was a well known researcher of the seven parishes of old New Kent County as well as other areas of Virginia. Jim has followed in his father's footsteps of researching and had recently uncovered information regarding events that occurred in King William County prior to the American Revolution. The account below has been taken from Mr. Harris' notes from the membership meeting.

*"Some years ago in researching my father's papers, I found a documented story that was not in his handwriting but appears to be in that of the late Rev Arthur Gray and is over 100 years old. Mr. Gray was also a devoted historian and was very interested in Colonial History. After his death, all of his research was passed to my father.*

*This story is about an occurrence in what is now King William County today. This is strictly about the history of a flag based on what happened about 1670.*

*Col. William Claiborne was one of the first land owners in the land between the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers. He was sent to the Colonies shortly after completing college in 1620 by King James as the King's Surveyor. He not only surveyed the land grants he also became a military leader, trader in beaver skins, Secretary of State, Treasurer as well as Co- Governor of Virginia and Maryland during the Commonwealth years. His home was probably where the State Police office is on Route 30 as the Claiborne graveyard is across the road behind what is today the Modr home.*

*Col. Claiborne had a hobby when he was on surveying trips to capture poisonous snakes. Rattlesnakes were found in eastern Virginia when the English arrived and are still*

*found in Dismal Swamp today. When he returned home he put the snakes in a barrel on the porch.*

*Sometime around 1690, a new priest was sent to Virginia as a parson for James City County and was given a list of things to do by the Royal Society. One of which was to find out about the rattlesnakes placed in Saint James Park in London by a member of the Colony. He [traveled] across the Pamunkey River and obtained this story from Col Claiborne's grandson (probably Capt. William Claiborne III who was living at Romancoke or Thomas Claiborne II who was living at Sweet Hall.)*

*The minister was told by Claiborne's grandson that his grandfather was upset that England was sending felons to Virginia. According to the account, Col. Claiborne decided that he would nail the lid on the barrel of snakes and attach a sign on the lid that said - "TO BE DELIVERED TO SAINT JAMES PARK IN LONDON AND THE CONTENTS TO BE RELEASED. IF YOU SEND US YOUR VENOM THEN HERE IS SOME OF OURS."*

*The first reference to this story was made by Benjamin Franklin's commentary in his Pennsylvania Gazette in 1751. Although Franklin did not claim to know where this story had originated, he thought that to thank England for sending convicted prisoners to America, the colonists should send rattlesnakes to them in return.*



*In 1754 Franklin used a rattlesnake cut into eight pieces each representing the colonies and that they should unite or die (From an old belief that if you cut a snake into pieces and it could come back to life if you joined the parts before sunset.) This had nothing to do with the Revolution but was in regard to the French and Indian war."*

Mr. Harris concluded his program with a display of many of flags of England and the United States. He explained the significance of the transformation of British flags dating from the St. George flag of 1275 through to the British flag of today. He also shared flags of the various militia of the colonies and later adaptations of those flags as well.

## **Museum News**

The King William Historical Museum's statue of Chief Powhatan received front page coverage in the December 25, 2013 issue of *The Richmond Times Dispatch*. Earlier this year the Women of Virginia Commemorative Commission wisely selected the Pamunkey Indian Queen Cockacoeske as one of twelve women who were worthy of recognition for her contributions to the development of the 400 year history Virginia.

The honorees will eventually be included in a bronze monument to be placed in Capitol Square. A big furor ensued when Princess Pocahontas was overlooked for the recognition, causing one panelist to take out a full page spread in support of Pocahontas as cited by the newspaper.

Quite coincidentally, the museum has recognized the Native Woman during our Year of the Woman this past season. Additionally, on March 1, 2014, we will be opening our museum with a new collection of artifacts. Mr. Herb Collins of Caroline County, has generously given us a collection of Native American artifacts. The exhibit will be added to a extensive collection already in the museum.

We will explore how Native Americans have enriched our collective culture, as well as view our local flora and fauna through the eyes of local artists and artisans.

*Rebecca Townsend*

## **Newsletter Subscriptions**

If you are currently receiving your newsletter through the postal service and are able to receive it through your email, could you please contact me with your email address by emailing me at [kwhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:kwhistoricalsociety@gmail.com) or call me 804-769-4562. This will not only save money for the society, but it will also allow us to keep you in the loop of future events from other historical societies and local programs.

Thank you.

*Audrey Mitchell*  
*Corresponding Secretary*