



# THE BULLETIN OF THE KING WILLIAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

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## THE BEST OF BICENTENNIAL TIMES

*\*by Emory M. Thomas*

One recent day a Georgia high school student asked a history teacher, "Why did they wait so long to celebrate the Bicentennial?" To his credit the teacher stifled his guffaw and patiently explained the meaning of "bicentennial" and the propriety of observing birthdays accurately.

Since then the teacher, and perhaps the student as well, have laughed out loud over the absurdity of celebrating a bicentennial before the United States reached age two hundred. Semantically the notion is ridiculous. But substantively the idea may have merit—unintended by the student to be sure—but merit nonetheless. There may have been far better times in which to celebrate our country's heritage. Had we but "fudged" just a little and held the Bicentennial a few years earlier, we might have felt more like celebrating.

Consider the year 1945, for example. Then the nation could claim an all but unbroken heritage of progress, prosperity, victory, and virtue. Sole possessor of atomic weapons, liberator of the victims of facism and Nazi genocide, the nation in 1945 might have celebrated a recent heritage of might and right.

Perhaps 1954 would have been an even better year in which to observe a national bicentennial. Dwight Eisenhower was in the White House and in the quiescence of the "buttdown" fifties, the United States might have celebrated a stable birthday with all due decorum.

Maybe 1962 would have been the best of all possible bicentennial years. That was the year in which Nikita Khrushchev "blinked first" in the Cuban Crisis, and Americans felt their security secure. The United States seemed blessed then, not only with prosperity, progress, victory, and virtue, but also with the Kennedy's and Camelot.

If only the American colonials had had the foresight to strike for independence in 1745, or 1754, or 1762, the Bicentennial would have certainly been easier to celebrate. Since about 1963, though, national euphoria has worn more than thin. The best popular chronicle of American life in the 1960's is appropriately entitled *Coming Apart*, and a fitting title for a book on the first half of the 1970's might be "Son of Coming Apart." To a people attempting to honor their heritage, the recent past has offered much for which to be humble.

Since 1962 Americans have endured the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and more. In the midst of general prosperity, *The Affluent Society* discovered pockets of poverty, conducted a war on poverty, and lost. The nation has conducted a massive war on racism, and racism has continually opened new fronts in that war. Americans have sacrificed blood, treasure, and prestige to fight a war in Vietnam and seen their sacrifices come to naught. A people confident of their righteousness have had to confront My Lai. A people who thought they believed in law and order have had to come to terms with Kent State and Watergate. A nation accustomed to wealth and power has had to endure simultaneous inflation and recession and to accomodate "third-world" oil sheiks in order to survive the opening throes of the energy crisis. Most Americans could not define the word ecology ten years ago; now, "We have met the enemy and he is us." A country whose name is "United" has found significant "gaps" between generations and sexes and more.

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## CARTER BRAXTON: Revolutionary Merchant

*by Alonzo Thomas Dill*

The writers of our Revolutionary history have bestowed far more attention on Virginia's fiery popular leaders—Patrick Henry, the Lees, Thomas Jefferson—than on conservatives like Pendleton, Harrison, the Nelsons, the Randolphs and Carter Braxton.

There are signs, however, that some of the balance is being redressed. In the 1950's the late David J. Mays produced his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Edmund Pendleton. Only this year another scholarly biography—that of Edmund Randolph—has been published. The Virginia Bicentennial Commission and Colonial Williamsburg are bringing out next year biographies of Carter Braxton and the Nelsons of Yorktown.

Let us remember that the conservatives had an indispensable role in the founding of the State and Nation. In those troubled times they controlled, with rare lapses, the machinery of Virginia's government. It was to them that the popular leaders turned in order to consolidate great changes and provide an orderly transition from colonial government to independence under the new Commonwealth and the Constitution of 1776.

I am not going into detail about Braxton's large share in that role. He was a third-generation member of the Virginia legislature and a stalwart of the dominant James-York river political bloc in the House of Burgesses, the revolutionary Conventions and the House of Delegates. He was a member of the King William County court and took his turn at serving as county sheriff. He was a member of the vestry of St. John's Church. He served as a member of both the State-wide and county Committee of Safety. Given his influence, it was inevitable that he should be chosen to represent the State in the Continental Congress. After the war, he was elected by joint ballot of the two houses to serve on the Council of State, or "Privy Council" to advise Patrick Henry and other governors.

With this brief sketch of Braxton's political career out of the way, I would like to talk about his mercantile career, in which he also had a large share in the winning of independence.

The tendency has been to depict the Revolutionary merchant as a sort of altruist, bringing in the essentials of war with little emphasis on moneymaking. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Braxton certainly was interested in turning a profit if he could do so, but he was no profiteer in the ugly sense of the word. Though he began life as a planter, he went heavily into trade in an effort to recoup the family fortunes. What the Braxtons had amassed over three generations had been sadly depleted by years of tobacco depression and ruinous debts to the British merchants who sold the tobacco in order to send manufactured goods to the American colonists. Braxton, as we shall see, had begun to sell off much of the land which his father and grandfather had accumulated. He was very definitely "living on capital" and not the proceeds of his wealth at the time the Revolution began.

One might think that a good way to make money quickly and easily, and yet supply an essential to the war effort, would be to import guns and ammunition into the State. Braxton evidently thought so, for one

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## NEW OFFICERS

The officers for 1976-78 were elected at the July business meeting.

President	George Meredith
Vice-President	W. Lynn Thomas
Recording Secretary	Miss Clare Mitchell
Corresponding Secretary	Mrs. Matteur Crute
Treasurer	Mrs. J. B. Sweet

The King William County Historical Society was founded April 6, 1974. The purpose of this society shall be the collection and preservation of everything relating to the history, antiquities, and literature of the County of King William, and Virginia in general.

### THE BEST OF BICENTENNIAL TIMES

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Suffice it to say that a people conditioned to Camelot has discovered that the legend of King Arthur is indeed a legend. The Bicentennial reality is not of the Round Table.

Yet for historians (for this historian at least) this is the best of times for a Bicentennial. At any time, Americans would celebrate their nation's birthday by reflecting upon their historical experience. Now such reflection upon the past seems especially worthwhile—indeed necessary, if we are to live in this present.

At the very least history offers the consolation that this generation of Americans is not the first to endure hardship and frustration. Americans had assassinated three presidents before John Kennedy. The country has undergone a truly "Great Depression" and lived with poverty in the past. The nation has faced the guilt of slavery and of the slaughter of native Americans. The United States has been divided before—divided to the extent of civil war. Americans have confronted political scandals, "legal" violence and "official" oppression in the past. And the country has suffered military defeats before; however frustrating has been the nation's recent effort at arms, no enemy has lately sacked and burned Washington as the British did in 1814. Reflection upon past frustrations cannot diminish American's concern for contemporary crises. But the past does offer prospective; it offers a context within which present problems are less than isolated catastrophes.

More important, reflections upon the American past during this Bicentennial might yield a broader appreciation of reality. Human experience in general and the American experience in particular has never been exclusively prosperity, progress, victory, and virtue. Like the Arthurian legend, the "great American success myth" is precisely that—a myth. Like the American present, the American past contains measures of success and failure. And such is the reality of the human experience.

Had Americans observed a bicentennial any earlier they might have codified mythology and celebrated an illusion of omnipotence and innocence. The recent past has demonstrated that Americans are fallible like other people. To those who have recently wrung hands and beaten breasts at the discovery that Americans are no better than other humans, the Bicentennial may offer comfort in the fact that Americans are no worse. Because the nation waited the full two hundred years to observe its Bicentennial, Americans now have the opportunity to make the best of their heritage—to reflect with clear eyes upon past experience in order to confront present reality.

It may be that historians have made our history too neat, too tidy, and easy to comprehend. As we know reality, to those who are in history, is never quite so neat, or tidy, or easy to comprehend. Because our written history has so often been the simple story of prosperity, progress, and victory, we expect the present to be like our perception of the past. And we tend to bewail our lot when a more complex, less promising reality intrudes upon us. Having begun with an example of this frustration phenomenon in the national present, let me now offer another example—this one from the local past.

During the late summer of 1781 the Marquis de Lafayette with the bulk of his army of Continental troops plus militia crossed the Pamunkey River at Ruffin's Ferry and encamped in the lower end of

King William County. Lord Cornwallis and his army of British Regulars were astride the York River at Yorktown and Gloucester. At the head of the York (which he called the "Forks of the York River"), Lafayette was able to keep an eye on Cornwallis and to oppose any British march inland no matter which side of the York Cornwallis chose for his route.

While Lafayette watched and waited, a French fleet commanded by Admiral de Grasse bearing a French army to reinforce that of the Comte de Rochambeau arrived in the Chesapeake Bay. The French scattered British ships in the Bay. Then with the aid of de Grasse's fleet the American commander George Washington was able to transport his army from New York and to concentrate his troops and allies on the Virginia Peninsula. In his turn Lafayette left King William and marched to join Washington in what became the siege of Yorktown. Denied support from the sea and ringed by his enemies, Cornwallis had no choice but to submit first to siege then to surrender. The campaign and the Revolutionary War ended on October 19 when Cornwallis capitulated.

The visit of Lafayette and his army to King William from August 13 through 30 marked the County's most significant involvement in the Revolutionary War. Yet for understandable reasons in the historical literature King William rates rather small notice. From the heights of hindsight, Lafayette's pause at the "Forks of the York" seems but a prelude to the Yorktown campaign and the ultimate American victory. In a sense, of course, it was. In the larger scope of the history of the Revolution, King William no doubt deserves no more than the footnote it usually receives. Nevertheless, the "larger scope" and historical hindsight quite often deny historical insight and so distort the reality of past experience. A closer look at King William's contact with the Revolutionary War reveals a past reality far more complex and much less tidy than our traditional overview. And if we focus upon Lafayette and his army during their sojourn in King William and share their perspective of the American Revolution, we might gain a deeper understanding of the experience we celebrate during this Bicentennial.

First we need to remember that Lafayette and the Americans with him did not share our hindsight; they did not know that their maneuver into King William would eventually lead them to Yorktown and victory. Indeed at the time victory in Virginia appeared the least likely outcome of the campaign against Cornwallis. Lafayette crossed the Pamunkey into King William with about 4500 men; Cornwallis at Yorktown had approximately 7200 troops. The Virginia campaign during the summer of 1781 had consisted primarily of Cornwallis marching at will over the countryside and of Lafayette following at a respectful distance. The young Frenchman knew better than to risk his small force in any major confrontation with Cornwallis. Thus he contented himself with harassing the British and with trying to create the illusion that he was chasing rather than following Cornwallis. From his camp at Montock Hill Lafayette realized that Cornwallis could defeat him should the British general determine to do so. Lafayette also realized that the prime reason his enemy ignored him was that Virginia was a secondary theater of the war. In fact Cornwallis had orders to reinforce Sir Henry Clinton's British army in New York where the showdown campaign was supposed to take place. Thus when Lafayette entered King William he feared defeat and hoped for an opportunity to fight elsewhere. These expectations and the course of the war changed while Lafayette was in King William. Because de Grasse believed he needed to return his fleet quickly to the Caribbean, Washington decided to concentrate in Virginia against Cornwallis instead of in New York against Clinton. Thus Lafayette recrossed the Pamunkey and left King William en route to victory nearby, instead of in retreat or on the march to a distant theater. And the point here concerns the spontaneity and fluidity of a situation then which now seems all so inevitable and fixed.

If we first need to remember that Lafayette's army lived in uncertainty during its stay in King William, we next need to forget our visions of this army as a fat and happy band of patriots sustained by their virtue alone. One of the reasons which moved Lafayette to move his army into King William (aside from the apparent tactical advantage) was the hope of improved provision and supply. The General planned to use both the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi as supply routes for his army, and he also dispatched foraging parties down the York to improve his own stores of food at the same time that he denied stores to the British. Nevertheless, despite these happy

prospects, logistical problems plagued the American army in King William as they had elsewhere.

Lafayette used the respite afforded by his two-week stay in King William to reopen his correspondence with Virginia Governor Thomas Nelson. Although both men were courteous and restrained in their expression, the points at issue were numerous and serious. Some time past the Governor had granted the General permission to draw money directly from the state treasury to meet some expenses of the campaign. Now Nelson complained that Lafayette's drafts had been extravagant. Lafayette admitted as much, but complained that he was the victim of extortion on the part of Virginia merchants and of the general worthlessness of Virginia's money. Next Lafayette found himself in the middle of a lingering quarrel between Nelson and General Anthony Wayne. At issue was a quantity of shoes which belonged to Virginia and which Wayne had taken for his Continental troops. Nelson wanted the shoes returned, and Wayne threatened to return the shoes and withdraw his barefoot soldiers from the campaign. Then Nelson complained that Lafayette's generals were insulting him, and the quarrel lingered longer.

To Washington, Lafayette wrote from King William, "From the moment I took command of this army there has not been a farthing sent from the treasury and this state money is good for nothing." A few days before he left King William Lafayette summarized his difficulties in another letter to Governor Nelson. He accused the civilian authorities of being "indifferent to the suffering of the army." Then he proceeded to give more specific details:

Unless more vigorous measures are adopted, we will be involved deeper and deeper in ruin. Few men in the field; not a sixth part of what is called for—a greater number without arms, the greatest part of whom live from day to day upon food that is injurious to their health, without six cartridges per man, and the poor Continentals that will soon be our only dependence [a complaint about the lack of militia troop's] falling off for want of spirits and flour . . . Should it be known to Lord Cornwallis, he may ruin us at one stroke, and defeat every project that may have been made for the protection of this state.

Finally, on the day he left King William, Lafayette informed Nelson, who by this time knew of the Franco-American plan to trap Cornwallis,

At the time that victory seems to be in our hands, I am sorry to say that the disappointments I have met with renders it extremely precarious . . . We have not 2000 militia fit to bring into the field. We are destitute of ammunition, and the army living from hand to mouth and unable to follow the enemy. So that on the arrival of the Spanish, French and American forces, I may be reduced to the cruel necessity to announce that I have not . . . power to stop the enemy.

Should Cornwallis attempt to escape the trap being laid for him, Lafayette's attempt to prevent this escape would be, the Frenchman predicted, "fruitless." Thus in Lafayette's mind, at least, the Revolution's logistical circumstance was fully as uncertain as the strategic. And ultimately the young general feared that the lack of cooperation on the part of civilian authorities might snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

Finally, just as scrutiny of Lafayette and his army's brief visit to King William may remind us of the precarious nature of the War and of the degree of chaos in American support for the war, so also may this interlude point up something less than political harmony in the patriot cause. Lafayette devoted some of the time he spent in King William to reflection on the fate of his good friend Thomas Jefferson. And such reflection was far from comforting. Jefferson, until very recently, had been Governor of Virginia. More recently than this he had been chosen by the Continental Congress as a potential member of the probable peace conference. Since Jefferson had fled Monticello before the British raiders commanded by Banistare Tarleton, the Congress had sent Jefferson's appointment to Lafayette to deliver. Lafayette did so, but meanwhile Jefferson's political enemies in Virginia had demanded an investigation of his conduct as governor. Reluctantly, therefore, Jefferson determined to decline the appointment to the peace commission and remain in Virginia to clear his name. Lafayette was surprised and horrified that such discord existed within the young nation. And while in King William he expressed his dismay at the treatment accorded "a man of intelligence" and "an eminent lawyer."

Of course the French general could have heard all about political disharmony during the night he spent at Carter Braxton's home in West Point. Braxton in and of himself was an example of fractious politics in the Revolutionary leadership. Although he signed the Declaration of Independence, Braxton was decidedly more conservative than this radical action indicated. He believed in independence, but he also believed that his would-be nation would fail if it tried to become a republic. His political ideal was England, purged of what he perceived to be England's grasping self-interest in public life. Accordingly Braxton proposed a political solution in a pamphlet entitled *An Address to . . . Virginia; on the Subject of Government . . .* Braxton's plan was for a government essentially more conservative than that of England. Among Braxton's fellow patriots Patrick Henry termed the pamphlet a "silly thing," and Richard Henry Lee called it a "contemptible little tract." Braxton was a good example not only of the discard in political tactics and personalities, but also of the variance in political philosophy within the American cause.

Lafayette and the Americans he commanded did not stay long in King William. And while they were at the "Forks of the York," they did nothing terribly momentous. Indeed the most significant thing the army did was leave King William to join the encirclement of Cornwallis' army at Yorktown. We might be tempted to say that the American force made no history in King William. Yet if history is no more and no less than experience, we need to recall it as total experience. The sojourn of Lafayette's army in King William was a prelude to success and victory at Yorktown. It was also a period of deep uncertainty and severe frustration within the patriot cause. To benefit from history, to learn from this experience, we need to recall the total experience. By so doing we might take a certain comfort in the fact that in this case at least uncertainty and frustration yielded victory and success.

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

A Report of the first two years of the Society given at the July meeting at "Elsing Green" by the president.

1. The *Constitution* was drawn up by a committee and adopted.
2. Excellent *pictures* of old homes in the county were taken by Miss Julia Henley of Walkerton.
3. A *map* of the location of old homes in King William County was made by Mrs. L. E. Wendenburg and Mrs. W. E. Garber after eighteen months of research and study. This was put in final form by Mr. Roy Thacker and these are available for sale.
4. A record of *old Post Offices* in King William County was researched in Washington, D.C. and compiled in booklet form by E. A. Smith and put on sale.
5. Mrs. Annie Page Edwards Russ has been compiling a list of *old graveyards* showing the names and dates on the tombstones.
6. Mrs. Emily Stevens has been collecting *histories* of the *churches* in the county.
7. A *House Tour* was held May 1st to raise money to install a recording at King William Court House giving a history of the Court House to visitors.
8. The *Bulletin* has been gotten out once a year by Mrs. L. E. Wendenburg and mailed to members.
9. Excellent programs have been presented at the meetings held on 1st Sunday in April, 2nd Saturday in July and 1st Sunday in October.
10. The membership has increased from 116 charter members to 269. Our Society has had a most successful two years.

CARTER BRAXTON  
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of the first "deals" he entered into with Robert Morris, the Philadelphia merchants, was for this purpose.

Braxton and Morris arranged a joint venture with an Amsterdam merchant to send them not only Dutch muskets, flints, bayonets and other munitions but a large quantity of Dutch manufactures as well. Nothing went right with the venture. Copies of Braxton's letters to Holland were intercepted by the British Admiralty, so the enemy was aware at the outset what was being planned. There were delays in getting together the tobacco with which to pay for the arms. Not until two years later, in 1778, did the arms begin to flow, and even then the Dutch dragged their heels presumably under diplomatic pressure from the British. France had by now entered the war on the side of the Americans, and the royal arsenals of France were sending over arms in quantity. Braxton and Morris suddenly found they had no markets. They estimated they lost about £ 3,000 sterling on the Amsterdam contract, and many of the arms laid in warehouses in the Dutch West Indies for the duration of hostilities. Braxton later was sued by the Dutch merchant for a balance remaining on the contract.

At about the same time as this joint venture, Morris and Braxton undertook to fit out a heavily armed privateer—a New England vessel bristling with 20 guns.

They engaged a brave captain, one Joseph Cunningham of Boston, and had high hopes of taking rich prizes. Unfortunately, Braxton made the mistake of telling the captain he could seize Portuguese vessels if he heard of the Portuguese seizing any American vessels. Portugal was an active ally of Great Britain and extremely hostile to United States interests. Captain Cunningham seems to have heard that the Portuguese were seizing American vessels in their harbors as a temporary measure. In any event, he bore down on a large Portuguese merchantman off the Grand Banks. The vessel and cargo were taken to Boston, where they were appraised at £23,000 Massachusetts currency. Braxton, of course had to give up the prize, and pay an indemnity to the owners of £ 3,400 sterling. It was another bad blow under the fortunes of war.

The true contribution of Braxton, Morris and their associates lay not in arms running or privateering, but in less spectacular ventures that assured a supply of goods and commodities for civilian and military use.

The salt trade was an example. Individuals everywhere were competing for this scarce article, so essential to the health of families and livestock and to the preservation of meat and fish. All efforts to manufacture salt in Virginia proved futile, so the source of supply had to come from outside the State, most of it from Bermuda and the West Indies.

As early as October, 1776, the State established price controls and a virtual monopoly over salt, and Braxton imported it under these legal conditions. On one occasion he obtained permission of the Virginia government to sell some salt to "relieve the distresses" of inhabitants in King William and other nearby counties. The colonists literally fought for the precious salt. A wagon train of salt dispatched by Braxton to Pennsylvania was attacked by an irate mob in that State and taken away from its armed guards. Once when a load of his French salt put into Frazer's Ferry on the Mattaponi River, the captain of the salt-laden vessel caused a near-riot by passing it out to farmers from the surrounding area. Salt was not a commodity to be taken lightly. It was, in its own way, as explosive as gunpowder.

Another important commodity was flour. Braxton owned many grain-growing plantations, grist mills and even bakeries and since the early 1760's had been shipping flour to New England and the West Indies. By this means, he had hoped to lessen his dependence on that fickle staple, tobacco.

To meet the demand in wartime, Robert Morris was quick to seize this potential for supplying large cities like Boston. Most of the flour was destined for civilian consumption, but Braxton and Morris willingly agreed to military purchase of large quantities. Agreement on the price inevitably brought the merchants in conflict with State and Continental purchasing agents and with Morris' enemies in Congress, who were quick to accuse him of monopolizing if he refused to sell to government and equally quick to condemn him of profiteering when he did sell and the price appeared high.

Like flour, salt and corned provisions, textiles of all sorts were heavily in demand, and the State of Virginia later in the war virtually confiscated stocks of dry goods which merchants had imported. But we could go on to discuss many other commodities, and that would supply us with more detail than would be meaningful for purposes of this talk.

Something should be told, in closing, about Braxton's losses and the extent to which his estate had dwindled just before and after the Revolution.

Losses in shipping were the critical factor, I suspect, in the decline. We have already mentioned the ill-starred privateer *Phoenix* and the neutral ship which she mistakenly captured. There was also the seizure by the enemy of the tobacco-laden brig *Braxton*, a ship that appears to have been built and owned out-right by the family. The *Braxton* was not only captured but suffered the misfortune of being struck by lightning. She became a total loss to Braxton and was sold out of his service. Other craft disappeared into the hands of the British without a trace. Of the fourteen or so vessels mentioned in documents as being partly or wholly owned by Braxton, at least half were swept from the seas by enemy action.

In 1779 alone, Braxton and his associates lost the schooner *Kitty*, 35 tons, laden with West India sugar, rum, coffee and salt; the brand-new schooner *Willis*, 55 tons, bound for St. Eustatius with tobacco, staves and some letters which the British published for propaganda purposes; sloop *General Washington*, 80 tons, also laden with West Indian imports; and ship *Bird*, a 200-ton armed vessel built just before the Revolution and loaded with tobacco and staves for Nantes, in France. The *Bird* was one of the largest losses of the whole war. The British claimed that her value was approximately £ 30,000 sterling. It is no wonder that William Aylett remarked that Braxton's foreign trade "has been unfortunate."

Land and personal property tax records reveal the decline in Braxton's personal wealth. In Amherst County had been his most extensive holdings in the Piedmont, and as we have pointed out he began selling off these lands piecemeal before the Revolution. At the end of the Revolution, he owned approximately 12,000 acres in King William, York, Halifax, Hanover and Amherst counties. By 1785 he was selling off the Halifax lands. By 1787-88 he still owned upwards of 8,500 acres, which placed him among the 100 largest landowners in Virginia. How much of the land was encumbered by mortgages is a question that cannot be answered.

Braxton had also been forced to sell most of the slaves that made the land productive. In 1782-83 he owned at least 165 blacks. Five years later the number had dropped to 91. Just before Braxton's death, he owned only 42. One slave was required to farm about thirty acres in Tidewater. Braxton could not have had many acres in production during his last years.

Braxton lived first at Newington in King and Queen County, later in Elsing Green and Chericoke in King William, during the war years in West Point. Appointed to the Council of State in 1786, he and his family moved to Richmond, where they lived in a rented house at what is now Broad and Fourth streets. There he died, a poor man. His burial place, as you may have heard, is not known. If the burial place should ever be found, I think I would suggest this as his epitaph. It is his own words in reply to a political enemy:

My publick conduct I am ready to submit to the decision of my country. My private character is registered before a tribunal far remote from your censure. My private opinions proceed from the principles of freedom, not clouded by partisan views or popular applause, self-interested objectives and family attachments, but solely directed to the rights of mankind, and that universal communion of sentiment, without which liberty cannot exist.

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#### KING WILLIAM COUNTY MEDAL

The face of this is a reproduction of the original seal of the Circuit Court of King William County, Virginia. In 1863 one Daniel Herskey of Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, a soldier in the Union Army, while with a raiding detachment at King William, saw and pocketed the seal. In 1927 the seal was located and graciously returned to King William County by Mr. Herskey, who had retained it in his possession.