

THE BULLETIN OF THE

# KING WILLIAM COUNTY

HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. OF VIRGINIA

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## “BASSETTARE”, “SKIDMORE’S”, “ HOLLYFIELD”

All names for a breathtakingly beautiful home

Which will be open for our Fall Meeting, October 6, 2002 , 3:00 p.m.

The J.H. Martin family will present a history of their home and will be open for tours,  
South of Rt.360 at the intersection of Rt. 604 ( North Carolina Road) and Rt. 605 ( Old Newcastle Road)

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Dear Friends,

A group of middle-schoolers, were allowed to choose their own subject matter for the Tricentennial Parade. They chose the King William Courthouse, The “light (ghost) at Cohoke”, and King William High School State Football Champs. As they floated by, I thought, WE ARE MAKING HISTORY, and this is what they will remember!

The King William County Historical Society held its first meeting on Sunday, April 7, 1974. The Society had been organized by the Upper King William County Woman’s Club for the “collection and preservation of everything relating to the history, antiquities, and literature of the county of King William particularly, and Virginia in general.” The Society holds three meetings each year 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday April-King William Court House; 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday July- King William Court House; 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday October-an old home in the county.

Your newly elected officers recently met to map out our journey over the next two years. On page 4 you will see a list of Officers, and Standing Committee Chairmen. They would appreciate your help.

The president has appointed several chairmen of special committees. They are:

**Wall Committee:** The second stage of the wall project has been completed, thanks to the hard work of Marian Jones, chairman, and committee members, Ruth Armatage, Ruth Childress, Alvin Lomax, and Emilie

Townsend. Until directed by the county officials, this committee’s work is on hold.

**Map Update:** Cary Puller and Donald Moren are in the process of updating the information on the King William County Map (first issued in 1976). The legend includes house sites (standing, vacant or no longer standing), as well as public buildings, such as churches, courthouse, etc. If you have any information that would expedite their work, please contact them.

**Cemetery Committee:** J. Jarvis Taylor of Arlington continues to amend the booklet, “Old King William County Cemeteries”. Assistance is still needed to see to the upkeep of the cemeteries. Preserving those sites is invaluable for genealogical study as well as the fact that there are many historically significant persons buried there.

**Thomas T. H. Hill Museum:** Thanks to the foresight and influence of Steven Colvin and J. Harvie Martin, III, the Society has been named a beneficiary to the estate of Thomas Taliaferro Hoskins Hill. Under the terms of the will, a building must be erected in twenty years, or the money will revert back to the estate to be redistributed. We have seventeen years left! The Advisory Committee will be meeting in the near future to decide the who, what, when, where, why, and most importantly, the HOW of moving this project forward, in a timely manner! If you are interested in serving

on this committee, or have someone you would like to recommend, please tell us.

We look forward to an Old Fashioned Christmas celebration on December 20<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm on the courthouse green. This will be the final official Tricentennial celebration, complete with Christmas music, trees decorated for different eras, a time capsule, and a visit from old St. Nick, himself. Anyone who likes Christmas should participate!

Before going forward, it is fitting that we recognize our retiring officers who have given so generously of their time and talents.

Steven Colvin, served as President from 1989 through 2002. During his tenure, Aylett Cemetery was unearthed and restored. (Thanks to the leadership of J. Jarvis Taylor of Arlington, Va.) Jarvis spent many hours and tanks of gas on this ongoing restoration project! Wortley White, Cary Puller and other friends and family assisted Jarvis in this backbreaking work.

Old King William County Cemeteries, an historic publication, compiled by Annie Page Russ, was built on information gleaned from over forty people. Jarvis Taylor undertook its printing which is now being prepared for a third edition. Any additions/corrections may be sent to the Corresponding Secretary, Kathryn Morrison, P.O. Box 37, King Wm., VA 23086.

The Thomas T. H. Hill Museum was conceived through the efforts of Steve Colvin and J. Harvie Martin, III, and the generosity of Thomas Hill, former Clerk of the Circuit Court. The property at Acquinton Church was deeded to the Society from the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, through the efforts of members of McKendree United Methodist Church. For MANY years local community members have been responsible for the upkeep of the grounds around the church. Outstanding in that effort have been Warren Gatewood, Sr. and Emmett Garber. An adjacent property known as Edwards Store was gifted to the society through the generosity of the late Baughman Stigall, who had plans to use it as a site for a museum.

The Society had new putty and paint put on the windows at the Christiadelphian Church at Lanessville, securing the interior of the oldest standing church of that denomination in the world! Although the church is vacant, its contents are intact, and with a little "dusting" it could be opened for services. It is a fascinating example of a turn-of-the-century house of worship. That building is still standing due to the continuing care of the C.L. Edwards family.

King William County's Tricentennial Celebration has taken the efforts of many people within the county. The year has been sprinkled with events highlighting our county's rich heritage. The Garden Club of the Middle Peninsula used many of our members to provide a spectacular show featuring Chelsea, Chericoke, Colosse Baptist Church, Elsing Green, King William Courthouse, Mangohick Baptist Church, Mattaponi Indian Reservation, Pamunkey Indian Reservation, St. John's Church, and W'har Dat Farm on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2002. On April 27<sup>th</sup>, a daylong festival with a parade, courthouse tours, jousting, and other activities too numerous to mention, attracted not only state officials, but also, out of state visitors.

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, Burlington, ancestral home of the Gwathmey's, was spotlighted in "King William Agriculture Then and Now" The Tricentennial Grand Finale will be celebrated, on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 6:00 p.m. at the courthouse.

All of the above projects were carried out during Steve's tenure, in addition to many interesting programs and tours. We traveled to Smithfield, where we saw the modern way of curing the good old Virginia Ham at Edward's packing plant, and some of us sampled peanut pie. We toured Bacon's Castle and the Smithfield Plantation. We visited Tudor House in Arlington and dined overlooking the Potomac. We walked the streets of historic Fredericksburg and visited Kenmore. We toured James Madison's "Montpelier" a restoration in progress, and visited an archeological dig at the ruins at Governor Spotswood's "Enchanted Castle".

In our own beautiful county, we toured Chelsea, Elsing Green, Flotbeck, Hollyfield, heard about ghosts at North Point, Retreat, and Roseville, visited Sweethall, Wakema, Windsor Shades, We. rededicated The Aylett Cemetery, visited St. David's Episcopal Church and heard Thomas Jefferson at Colosse Baptist Church. Many other speakers at the Courthouse included the likeness of Rudy Lee, Robert E.'s grandson, and the Widow Nelson from Wyoming.

The Vice President, Cary Puller was helpful in getting meetings together, and spent much "sweat equity" making sure that they ran smoothly. He also took the thankless task of overseeing the upkeep of the Aylett Cemetery.

Shirley Guy recorded the minutes faithfully, and Margaret Moren saw to the mailings in a timely manner.

Marion Upshaw spent many hours seeing to the keeping of our books.

Members at Large: Annie Page Russ: a charter member, has worked with the Society in ways too numerous to mention. Her forays throughout the county in search of tombstones led her to compile her records into the booklet "Old King William County Cemeteries". She has used the dress that she wore for the Sweet Hall House Tour many times, most recently to celebrate her beloved Colosse's bicentennial celebration this year.

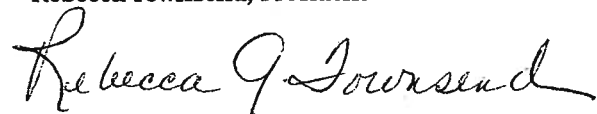
Mary Anna Billups: second grade teacher to many of us, and a charter member, has been active in the association since its inception. Her astute recollection and wise council has done much to stay the course of the Society as it has passed through times of change.

Ruth Armatage served also at large, and is now Recording Secretary.

Your officers and other faithful members of the Society made sure that you had scrumptious refreshments after your meetings.

THANK YOU ONE AND ALL!

Rebecca Townsend, President



Items for sale by the Society and the Tricentennial Committee may be found in the Clerk of the Circuit Court's office as well as by calling Katy Lloyd, King Wm. Co. Information Officer, at 769-4985

Colonel Roger Gregory . . . . . JURIST, STATESMAN, PATRIOT



Seated, (center, holding umbrella) with a class of law students, Richmond College 1890's  
Photo courtesy of William Gregory of New Kent County

by Steven A. Colvin

During the uncertain times of the new millennium, the advice given to those launching a career is to "do what you love, love what you do, and deliver more than you promise." The prospect of following one's gut had as much meaning to a young man called Roger Gregory in the years after the Civil War as it does to young people today. The examination of Gregory's career proves that, in life, he stuck to the two things he loved most—the law and his home turf at "Elsing Green."

Elsing Green had been purchased in 1820 by Gregory's grandfather, William Gregory. The house was built on the banks of the Pamunkey River in 1717, by a previous owner, William Dandridge. William Gregory, willed valuable farmland to each of his three sons. When William died in 1840, his eldest son, Roger, inherited Elsing Green and a place called "Moore's," Moore's had been cut from "Chelsea," and had been owned for more than a century by the Moore family. It was also in 1840 that William Gregory's younger son, Fendall Gregory, inherited "Piping Tree," a place as important as Elsing Green in the annals of Virginia's colonial history. Fendall Gregory also inherited "Hockley Neck" in King and Queen County. The third Gregory son, also called William, inherited what was called the "Brick House" in New Kent County.

The Roger Gregory of our interest was born at Moore's on the Mattaponi River, on April 3, 1833. Roger was seven years old when his father, Roger Gregory, Sr., moved from Moore's to Elsing Green. The mere lad who moved to Elsing Green at the age of seven would call the place his home until his death in 1920 at the age of eighty-eight.

Elsing Green was a sprawling plantation of 1000 acres of fertile Pamunkey River bottom ground. Roger Gregory, Sr., an extensive planter, acquired "Frazer's Ferry," on the Mattaponi River, in 1842. The depth of the river at

Frazer's allowed sailing vessels to maneuver easily with cargoes of Gregory's corn and wheat

The Senior Roger Gregory died in 1850, when his son, Roger, was seventeen years old. The land and slaves were divided between his widow, Maria Ellett Gregory, and her four sons, William, Roger, Junius, and Deucalion. When he died, the younger Roger was a student at the University of Virginia. There he spent one year. He had gone to the University at the age of sixteen, after studying classics, science, and mathematics at King William's Rumford Academy. In 1852, Gregory began the study of law at the College of William and Mary. He excelled, and was at the head of his class after one year. He returned to the University of Virginia to continue his law studies, again, moving to the head of his class. He was elected class president. While at the University of Virginia, Gregory was selected by the Dean, John Botts Minor, to "prepare the 'Analytical Digest' of books prepared and taught by Mr. Minor." Gregory took over Minor's classes when the professor was ill for three months. He was admitted to the Bar two years later.

From the moment of his birth, Roger Gregory had known advantage. He had been born into Virginia's affluent planter class, and he had been given a sound education. After his graduation from the University of Virginia, Gregory became a partner in the law practice set up in King William in 1846 by Beverley Browne Douglas. Douglas' family had sold Elsing Green to Roger's grandfather, William, and after Roger's father's death, Douglas would become young Roger's mentor.

In 1852, when he was thirty years old, Beverley Douglas had been elected to the Virginia Senate. He earned the respect of his colleagues and served for five years as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. For thirteen years, Roger Gregory, working alongside Douglas, had the opportunity to learn the legal business from one of Virginia's highest-ranking

attorneys. Gregory and Beverley Douglas had an alliance that was sealed by the secession of Virginia in 1861. Douglas entered the service of the Confederate Army as a First Lieutenant in "Lee's Rangers." He would earn the rank of major, and by 1863, his law partner, Roger Gregory, would become Douglas' lieutenant.

Clues to the fate of Elsing Green during the Civil War are few. During the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, Union General George McClellan established his headquarters at the White House on the Pamunkey River, two miles below Elsing Green. King William's nineteenth-century historian Peyton Neale Clarke has said that during this campaign Union troops "quartered their horses in stone-paved halls." Although no reports exist in official records to substantiate this claim, Clarke also stated that during the Civil War, Elsing Green was "very badly treated." George Cherry, a student at the T.C. Williams School of Law in 1977, wrote that when marauding troops approached Elsing Green, A far-sighted servant concealed the Gregory family's "store of liquor." Roger Gregory's young bride, Bettie Gregory, was allowed "to pass safely through the Union lines to Richmond."

First married to Mary Ann Maria Brookes in 1855, Roger Gregory lost both wife and infant son, William, within two years. In 1861, he married Miss Elizabeth Frances Allen of Richmond's "Allen Avenue" family. He and Bettie had eight children. Bettie lived on the plantation, while the Judge taught at Richmond College. Law student, Cherry relates a time when "he owned a home in Richmond but chose to rent it to his daughter while he stayed at the Hotel Jefferson He was residing there when the great fire occurred. When he got to the elevator to leave the building he realized he had left his watch. Telling himself (sic) 'Bettie would not want me to go back,' he got onto the elevator. He was with the last load of hotel guests that were taken down.... He then boarded with his daughter in the home that he owned, with his law office in the basement of that building at 11 North Sixth Street"

After the war, Gregory returned home to King William, to resume his law practice. When The Virginia Constitution of 1867-68 created the county court system, Roger Gregory was elected the first judge (never running for election). He sat the bench from that time until 1877. An

SOCIETY OFFICERS, ELECTED JULY, 2002

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 (annual dues of \$8.00 are due to King Wm. Hist. Soc. at the July meeting, or mail to P.O. Box 28, King Wm, Va 23086)  
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interesting observation of his astuteness is that not one of his decisions was ever reversed! He served a brief stint in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1879-1880.

Gregory was the only Professor of Law at Richmond College from 1890 to 1900, teaching the whole gamut of classes necessary for a law degree. He was chosen to chair the first Professorship of Law provided by T. C. Williams, and, therefore, planned and organized the new law school of Richmond College. He continued to teach there until 1906

Cherry also states that although Gregory "identified with the life of Richmond through his work in the school and church, (First Presbyterian) his heart remained at Elsing Green. He commuted a great deal using one of two commuter trains that ran daily from King William County to Richmond. Should he miss the trains, which departed at 8:00 and 9:00 a.m., he would resign himself to several hours' carriage ride with a simple, "Drive on, Silas." There was no problem with being late to classes as they did not start until 4:00 or 4:30 p.m. in the afternoon."

In 1906 he retired to his beloved Bettie and Elsing Green. She died in October of 1919, and he survived her for less than a year, dying September 12, 1920, one hundred years after his grandfather purchased Elsing Green

Resources for "Col. Roger Gregory"

1. Will of William Gregory of Elsing Green, probated 24 Feb. 1840, King Wm. Will Book 1, 30-31
2. Woodford Broaddus Hackley, Faces on the Wall: Brief Sketches of the Men and Women Whose Portraits and Busts were on the campus of the University of Richmond in 1955, Virginia Baptist Society, 1975
3. King William County Land Tax Books 1812-1848, Microfilm Collection, Library of Va.
4. Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Men of Mark in Virginia Men of Mark Publishing Company, Washington, 1909.
5. Peyton Neale Clarke, Old King William Homes and Families. Originally pub. Louisville, Ky., 1897 Reprint, Regional Publishing Co. Baltimore, 1964.
6. Cherry, George, Law Student Univ. of Richmond, 1977,
7. Roger Gregory of Tunstall, Va,
8. Margaret Sheehan of Richmond

Mitch Upshaw.....769-2045

Hospitality Chairman.....Wortley G. White 769-2758  
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