

# KING WILLIAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly Newsletter  
October 2020

## IN THIS ISSUE



*Acquinton Church*

The membership meeting planned for Sunday, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020, has been cancelled due to Covid-19. The Museum is closed at this time. We will let you know when it reopens.

We look forward to our next meeting for on Sunday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021, at 2:30 p.m.

P.2: The President's  
Message

P. 3: Member News

P. 5: Pre-Colonial  
Indian History in King  
William

P. 7: Member  
Information

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

As this pandemic drags on, I would like to tell you about an interesting event that took place at the Colonial Courthouse Green on the night of Saturday, August 8th, 2020. Terry Osborne of ISDP Paranormal contacted the King William County Administrator to obtain permission to perform an investigation in the courtyard in front of the old jail. Terry came by my office and explained that ISDP Paranormal was mostly interested in the area in front of the old jail where a “hanging tree” used to be located. Ms. Osborne came by to see me because she wanted to know when the King William Museum would be open so she could do some research in advance of the ISDP investigation.

After the ISDP investigation, Terry came by again and reported that the investigation had been very active and much contact had been made with the paranormal. The ISDP team reportedly communicated with two brothers who were enslaved, and those spirits pointed the ISDP team to the area in the courthouse green where the “hanging tree” had been located and indicated that this was where they met their demise. The team also encountered the spirit of an indigenous man who was murdered behind the Courthouse and his remains were discarded in the Mattaponi River.

For those of you who would like to see pictures from the ISDP Paranormal Investigation on August 8th, there are images and videos posted on their website as well as on Facebook. ISDP Paranormal has performed many investigations including Hanover Tavern and Belle Grove. They will also be performing a paranormal investigation at the New Kent Colonial Courthouse and Jail in the near future. Terry Osborne also expressed an interest in ISDP Paranormal partnering with the King William County Historic Society in the future to hold fundraiser events that would promote King William County history as well as ISDP Paranormal's missions.

I hope that you are all staying well and safe as we enter another season of historic times. I will keep you all in my thoughts until there is a time when we can meet in person.

Best Regards,

*Sally W. Pearson*

President, King William County Historic Society

### **Archaeology Continues at the King William County Courthouse**

We are proud to announce that another field season of archaeology will continue to illuminate the complex and interesting history of the King William County Courthouse area. Even in the midst of a pandemic, we will safely socially distance while expanding the archaeological survey and testing strategy begun in 2019 and continued earlier this year. The remarkable public engagement on each dig day was inspirational, and we know how much it meant to every fourth grader in King William County when they toured the museum, walked the grounds, learned about the historic buildings, and got their hands dirty finding artifacts from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.

The survey and excavations this field season will focus on three areas: the area within the low brick wall where we know a general store once stood, the area to the east (in the forest) where we presume the old tavern served hungry and thirsty travelers for over a century, and more of the green across the Courthouse road where a hotel once stood. We hope that the survey work will not only indicate where we should conduct larger excavations, but also help with the upcoming exhibit in the museum that will focus on colonial taverns.

Lastly, we look forward to hearing a presentation on the first field season's discoveries by Past President Dr. David A. Brown at the upcoming membership meeting on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Dr. Brown will discuss the artifacts found to date and what these tiny pieces of history can tell us about the people who lived, worked, and visited the courthouse and its surrounding complex of jails, clerks' offices, taverns, and more. Keep your eyes peeled to our social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) for updates on when our dig days will be and if we can accommodate volunteers. Hopefully we can see you there and you can help us rediscover the past!





### **King William County Record Book Transcription Project Update**

We are excited to announce that a draft transcription of King William County Record Book 2 is complete and currently awaiting review and formatting. We hope to complete this final stage in the next two months and have the final version ready for purchase (alongside Record Book 1) just in time for Christmas. As with Record Book 1, this transcription will be fully key-word searchable, allowing researchers to find those needles in the haystack you've all been looking for. At the same time, you can read the original pages opposite the transcriptions, seeing the words as they were written (while still finding your ancestors or ancestral homes easily and efficiently).

This transcription is on the second of 19 books that were saved from the late 19th-century fire that destroyed our clerk's office. For many years, researchers were left with a poorly imaged microfilm copy and a limited index (in most cases) to access these books. Through the hard work of Bibb Edwards and several Historical Society members (Lloyd Huckstep, Anne Jackson, and others) we are blessed to have high resolution photos of all of the surviving pages (over 9000) from all of the 19 books (you can buy a thumb drive with those images right now, too). This transcription project is the natural outgrowth of that endeavor, making our county's historic records as accessible as possible.

The Record Book 1 publication is now available on a thumb drive and is copyrighted, password protected and print restricted. Each copy costs \$50 with the proceeds supporting the King William County Museum. If you are interested in purchasing Record Book 1 now, or in reserving a copy of the Record Book 2 publication, please email [kwhs@kingwilliamhistory.org](mailto:kwhs@kingwilliamhistory.org).



## PRE-COLONIAL INDIAN HISTORY IN KING WILLIAM

By Gus Kasper

As many of our members know, our county is home to three major Indian reservations that in recent decades have received federal recognition. King William is unique in this respect; in fact, our county alone holds more than a third of all the federally recognized tribes in Virginia.<sup>1</sup> These reservations are the Mattaponi, Upper Mattaponi, and Pamunkey. The history of these tribes goes beyond just King William history, however, as these Indians were a part of the greater Powhatan Confederacy.

Before King William was established in 1702, the land between the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers was known by many names. It was once part of New Kent, and later King and Queen. But before English settlement, this area was part of the Powhatan homeland which the Indians referred to as Tsenacomoco.<sup>2</sup> The Powhatan Confederacy of Tsenacomoco spanned much of the Virginia tidewater and included over thirty different tribes when the English first began to settle in the area.<sup>3</sup>

Their leader was Powhatan, a man who came from a hamlet near the fall line of the James River. When he came to power sometime in the latter half of the sixteenth century, he inherited six major chiefdoms. Two of these were the Mattaponi and the Pamunkey, both located in King William. According to a prominent scholar of Powhatan history, Helen C. Rountree, both the Mattaponi and Pamunkey were valuable to the Powhatan Confederacy for very important reasons. The Mattaponi served as a “bread basket<sup>4</sup>” when hard times befell the more western villages on the borderlands of the Confederacy. These western villages often warred with the Monacans, who could disrupt their agricultural production. The Pamunkey, while yielding stable agricultural produce, also held Uttamusak, which was the holiest place in the Confederacy.<sup>5</sup>

Powhatan was the paramount chief of his people, meaning that he was the highest authority of the land. His power, however, was not like the absolute power held by contemporary European kings.<sup>6</sup> Instead, he ruled over a loosely connected Confederacy. Powhatan appointed certain people, usually relations, to positions of local power within his domain. These local chiefs were known as *werowances*, and even they were not entirely subservient to the paramount chief.

Although there are few Indian sources who reported on their daily lives, there is a wealth of information that can be gleaned from English colonists and explorers. It appears that the Powhatan Indians relied mostly on subsistence practices to survive, including hunting, fishing, and farming. All able-bodied men and women worked to provide for their family, and “each family with at least one male and one female adult could live in comfort entirely by its own labors.”<sup>7</sup> Their vast tracts of land easily provided subsistence to a relatively sparse population. In 1600 England had a population nearly 350 times the size of the Powhatan Confederacy, with their land holdings being not even

## PRE-COLONIAL INDIAN HISTORY IN KING WILLIAM

10 times as large.<sup>8</sup>

Today, Virginia Indians live on a fraction of the land they once occupied. Although largely marginalized in American society, Indians are still a large part of the community in King William. For more information on Native American history, visit both the Pamunkey Indian Museum and the Mattaponi Indian Heritage Museum.

*Gus Kasper is a student majoring in History at the University of Mary Washington.*

<sup>1</sup>“Virginia Indians” Virginia is for Lovers, <https://www.virginia.org/virginiaindians/>

<sup>2</sup> Rountree, Helen C., *Pocahontas, Powhatan, and Opechancanough*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville and London, 2005 (Pg. 8)

<sup>3</sup> Gleach, Frederick W., *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia*. University of Nebraska Press, 1997, (Pg.22).

<sup>4</sup> Rountree, *Pocahontas, Powhatan, and Opechancanough*, (Pg. 43)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia*, (Pg. 28)

<sup>7</sup> Rountree, Helen C., *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman and London, 1989 (Pg. 32).

<sup>8</sup> Rountree, *Pocahontas, Powhatan, and Opechancanough*, (Pg. 14).





## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Annual Membership expires twelve (12) months after your last dues payment.

Family \$30

Student \$10

Individual \$20

Lifetime \$250

Artifact Level \$150+

Pamunkey/Mattaponi Level \$300+

Thomas T. H. Hill Benefactor Level  
\$500+

Corporate Sponsorship \$500+

Mail to:

King William Historical Society  
P.O. Box 233  
King William, VA 23086



*An anchor plate used for structural reinforcement, as seen on the King William Courthouse Square. Many anchor plates are made in a style that is decorative.*

---

*The King William Museum is open Sundays from  
1:00 - 5:00 PM, March through November, and by  
prearranged appointment (closed on major holidays).  
Located at 227 Horse Landing Road,  
King William, Virginia*

---



---

One of the most important rights of American Citizens is the franchise – the right to vote.  
Please exercise your right and vote in the upcoming election.

---

