

KING WILLIAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly Newsletter
July 2021

IN THIS ISSUE

UPCOMING MEMBERSHIP MEETING

July 18, 2021, 2:30 PM

Administration Building, King William Courthouse
180 Horse Landing Road, King William, VA 23086

Please join us for the next meeting of the King William Historical Society which will be held on Sunday, July 18th at 2:30. This will be our first in-person meeting since the pandemic began. We also hope to broadcast it live on Zoom and will send an email invitation for the Zoom meeting to those for whom we have email addresses.

Our speaker, Mark Greenough, will be speaking on "How Justice Grew." Join our speaker to explore the influence of county courts, local courthouses, and court day traditions in shaping the lives of Virginians for many generations. Discover how judges, sheriffs, clerks, and lawyers played their roles in rural communities. Learn how the architecture of courthouses and their immediate surroundings helped to shape the public events associated with them. A curious audience is invited to attend and no jury duty will be required of them. Refreshments will be available after the presentation and the 1725 Courthouse will be available for tours.

Mark Greenough has worked as Historian at the Virginia State Capitol since 2002. He previously worked as a first-person living history interpreter for the National Park Service from 1980 to 1985 and later worked at the Virginia Historical Society. His publications include short histories of the Virginia General Assembly and the Capitol Square grounds, as well as several articles about the history of Virginia's classical Capitol. He has also worked as an historical and technical advisor for numerous television productions involving historical subjects including "Founding Fathers" and "Founding Brothers." Mark has a B.A. in History from the University of Santa Clara and additional graduate coursework in historical archeology, American material culture, and historiography at the College of William & Mary.

P.2: The President's Message

P. 3: Archaeological Findings at the Colonial Courthouse

P. 4: Member News

P. 6: A Historic Crossing at Walkerton

P. 8: Member Information

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

I hope you are enjoying the summer weather and have plans to celebrate July 4th. We celebrate on the 4th of July to commemorate the signing of the United States Declaration of Independence. We are fortunate to have Carter Braxton (September 10, 1736 to October 10, 1797) from our area. Carter Braxton was a signer of the United States Declaration of Independence, as well as a merchant, planter, and Virginia politician. Braxton lived first at Newington in King and Queen County, later in Elsing Green and Chericoke in King William. During the war years he lived in West Point and there is a historical marker in the Town to recognize him. He was a grandson of Robert "King" Carter, one of the wealthiest and most powerful landowners in the Old Dominion. Carter Braxton was active in Virginia's legislature for more than 25 years. He was instrumental in leading our nation from colonial government to independence under the new Commonwealth and the Constitution of 1776.

Carter Braxton 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. Carter Braxton's mercantile career had a large share in the winning of independence from Great Britain. Although Braxton 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 had begun to sell off much of the land which his father and grandfather had accumulated.

Although Braxton's attempts to import guns and ammunition were unsuccessful and costly, his true contribution was that he 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. The State established price control and a virtual monopoly over the salt that Braxton imported. On one occasion Braxton obtained permission of the Virginia government to sell some salt to relieve the distresses of inhabitants in King William and other nearby counties.

Appointed to the Council of State in 1786, Braxton and his family moved to Richmond where they rented a house at what is now Broad and Fourth streets. There he died a poor man. His burial place is not known.

I am looking forward to seeing you all at the in-person membership meeting to be held on July 18th at the King William County Administrative Building.

With Kindest Regards,

Sally W. Pearson

President, King William County Historical Society

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AT THE COLONIAL COURTHOUSE

Archaeologists from The Fairfield Foundation recently recovered a nearly complete tin-glazed earthenware plate during their recent archaeological excavations at the colonial courthouse. Our friends at Ceramics in America, specifically Rob Hunter, found evidence that the plate was produced in a factory in Liverpool, England. A dated example is on display in the Liverpool Museum (see black and white photo) and is nearly identical. The image does the item no justice as it is painted in blue over white, just as the one found in King William. The Liverpool example has the initials for the plate's designer (R I E) and the year of manufacture (1744). We are reaching out to the museum with the hope of sharing our photo and obtaining one from them (in color) in return. Fragments of similar plates (two different sizes) were found during excavations at Colonial Williamsburg's Wetherburn's Tavern.

We anticipate having the plate cataloged and mended so that we can have it ready for display when and how the museum decides. We will also have several other items for the museum to consider for display, including a substantially complete case bottle, several smaller, personal items, and more. We are working on a final catalog and hope to have that and the draft report ready to distribute shortly.

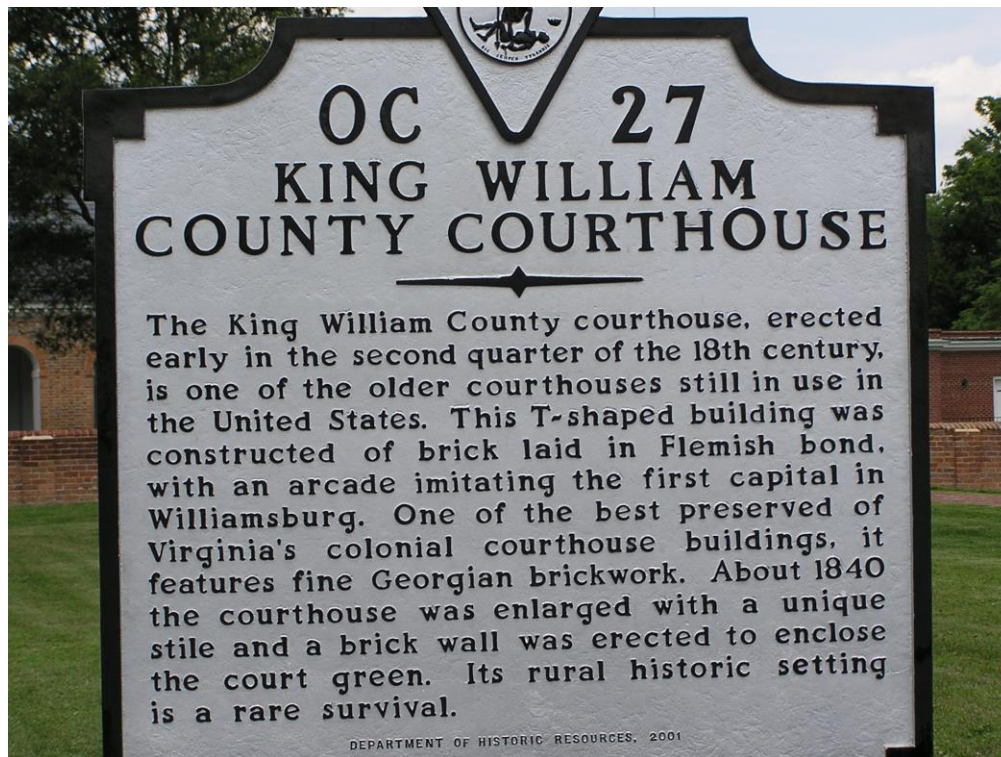


MEMBER NEWS

SUGGEST A NEW HISTORIC HIGHWAY MARKER

The King William County Historical Society needs your help recognizing our most significant persons, events, places, and facts on a new historic highway marker. We are asking our membership to suggest the subject of the next marker we have in the county. The Virginia Department of Historic Resource's historical highway marker program documents subjects prominently identified with the history of the nation, state, or region. Our goal is to educate the public about Virginia's history, not to honor, memorialize, or commemorate persons, events, or places. Because highway markers are not honorific in nature, they do not serve the same purpose as monuments, statues, memorial plaques, or war memorials - but they are a great way to bring attention to our shared heritage.

We welcome your suggestions and ask that you write a sentence or two about why you think the subject is best suited for a highway marker. Need some examples? Check out the state's website to read any of the markers in the state (<https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/highway-markers/>) including all of the ones we already have in King William. We will compile the suggestions from our membership and select a handful for consideration by our board of directors who will then work together with those who suggested the subject in order to write the sign text. The text will be reviewed and approved by Virginia's Department of Historic Resources and the Historical Society will fund the highway marker with support from our Coon Fund annual grant. If you have suggestions, please email them to kwhs@kingwilliamhistory.org or write out your suggestion and mail them to us at PO Box 233, King William, VA 23086. And thank you in advance for your help!



MEMBER NEWS

KWCHS Minutes from the April 18, 2021 Meeting

The membership of the King William County Historical Society met via Zoom on April 18, 2021 at 2:30 pm. There were approximately 25 members present. A program was presented by Elizabeth Donison and Dr. David A. Brown of The Fairfield Foundation. The program highlighted findings from the first field season of archaeological research and previewed preliminary findings from this winter/spring's second season.

Update on the Museum

The King William County Museum renovations are well under way. New flooring has been installed throughout the Museum. New wood cabinetry is being built in the research room. Installation of a new Colonial Tavern exhibit is in progress. We hope to use some of the artifacts discovered during recent archaeological digs in the new exhibit. And a new garden has been planted outside, too. As part of our renovation, we are reorganizing our phone lines and website and its links. We apologize for any inconvenience that this has caused. Thank you for your patience and continued support as we look to hopefully reopen the museum this fall. Stay tuned for more information on the Museum reopening. Many thanks to Chris Harris, Rebecca Townsend, and all members of the Museum Council for their work to bring about these exciting improvements to our museum.

Reminder on Dues

Our Fiscal Year ended June 30. If you haven't paid your dues in the past twelve months, they are now due. Only members in good standing receive the Newsletter.



A new garden installed by Rebecca Townsend

A HISTORIC CROSSING AT WALKERTON

By Gus Kasper

For hundreds of years people have crossed the Mattaponi River at Walkerton. The crossing between King William and King and Queen has linked together both counties since perhaps as early as 1696.¹ Originally crossed by ferry, the Mattaponi at Walkerton was later bridged by three physical structures beginning in the early 20th century. These four modes of crossing were constructed in very different ways and each one altered the landscape significantly.

The ferry at Walkerton was first established sometime between the late 17th century and the mid-18th century.² It was first operated by John Waller, owner of Enfield plantation in King William. On September 18th, 1744, the General Assembly of Virginia passed a law which required that a public warehouse be constructed on the river frontage of Enfield “to be erected at Waller’s ferry,” proving the ferry was constructed by at least that date.³ It was most likely a cable operated ferry and may have resembled the one shown here. The ferry served as an adequate mode of transportation until the end of the 19th century when the population of Walkerton began to grow.⁴

In 1904 the Walkerton and Mattaponi River Bridge company was formed “by a group of local investors” who erected the first bridge at Walkerton.⁵ The bridge was a wooden draw bridge, which allowed steam boat travel upriver to the wharves at Aylett and as far as Dunkirk. It was a single lane bridge “with a wider segment in the center to allow traffic to pass.”⁶ The wooden construction of the bridge, however, made it especially susceptible to rot and it eventually had to be replaced.

In 1936, the State Department of Highways built a swing-truss bridge. This bridge was actually comprised of two spans. A small span covered the distance between the Walkerton side of the river and a dredging island (this island is where the swing-truss portion of the Walkerton Bridge currently rests). An additional longer span, including the moveable portion of the bridge, bridged the distance between the dredging island and King William. The swing-truss bridge type was a common fixture at that time in tidewater Virginia, as it provided for an easy and cost-effective way to ford a wide, navigable river like the Mattaponi.⁷ The swing-truss bridge was manually powered, and was operated by a bridge tender. When cranked open, the bridge would pivot on a concrete pier, creating a “156-foot divided opening.”⁸

Although swing-truss bridges were once a common sight in the area, by the time of its demolition the Walkerton bridge had become an oddity; only a handful were left in Virginia by the



¹Minnie O. Lewis Mitchell, “The Walkerton Ferry,” *The Bulletin of the King & Queen County Historical Society*, no. 7 (July, 1959). This source mentions that “the Walkerton ferry is noted on a map of Endfield” in 1696. The map referenced has not been discovered by the author.

² William Waller Hening, transcribed by Freddie L. Spradlin, *Hening’s Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia from the first session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, Chapter VII September 18th, 1744 (233), <http://vagenweb.org/hening/vol05-13.htm>. This is the first mention of the ferry as found by the author.

³ Hening, *Hening’s Statutes at Large*, Chapter VII September 18th, 1744 (233).

⁴ Donald W. Linebaugh, *Walkerton Bridge*, Written Historical and Descriptive Data, Historic American Engineering Record, NPS Northeast Region (Philadelphia, PA: U.S. Custom House 1992), 9.

⁵ Linebaugh, *Walkerton Bridge*, 10.

⁶ Ibid, 10.

⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁸ Ibid, 13.

1990's. By this time the wooden pilings supporting the bridge had deteriorated significantly, not unlike the pilings of the preceding wooden draw bridge. In 1991, highway department engineers put a 5-ton cap on vehicles crossing the bridge. Previously, there was an 18-ton limit, and only a year and half before the limit was 25-tons.⁹ With the weight limit reduced to only 5 tons, heavy vehicles like logging trucks could no longer pass over the bridge. This threatened to turn Walkerton into a "dead end... for commercial traffic." The presence of a rare mussel, the tidewater mucket, and a rare aquatic plant, the water hyssop, at Walkerton further complicated the process of constructing a new bridge. The Environmental Protection Agency then had to approve any construction plans.¹⁰

Finally in 1994, the Commonwealth Transportation Board awarded the Abernathy Construction Corp. of Glen Allen a \$3.34 million contract to build a new Walkerton Bridge.¹¹ The bridge, constructed of high-performance concrete, was completed in the summer of 1996.¹² It was named after Latane Trice, a man of local importance who had strong community ties. He was also largely involved in politics,¹³ which helps to explain how the Virginia legislature passed an act naming the bridge in honor of him.¹⁴

The moveable portion of the old swing-truss bridge was preserved by a local philanthropist, Caroll Lee Walker, who paid for its relocation to the dredging island just off shore of the King and Queen side of the river.¹⁵ The bridge remains a symbol of Walkerton, familiar to King William and King and Queen residents alike. It even has a song named after it, entitled "The Old Walkerton Bridge" by the local *Runaway String Band*.¹⁶



Gus Kasper is a museum volunteer and student of history at Mary Washington University.

⁹ Mark Felsenthal, "Walkerton Finds Limit a Dead End for Bridge," *The Daily Press*, July 15th, 1991. <https://www.dailypress.com/news/dp-xpm-19910715-1991-07-15-9107150057-story.html>.

¹⁰ Felsenthal, "Walkerton Finds Limit a Dead End for Bridge."

¹¹ "Contracts Set for Bridge Projects," *The Daily Press*, November 18th, 1994, <https://www.dailypress.com/news/dp-xpm-19941118-1994-11-18-9411180138-story.html>.

¹² David C. Smith, "The Promise of High-Performance Concrete," *Public Roads* 60, no. 2 (Fall 1996), <https://highways.dot.gov/public-roads/fall-1996/promise-high-performance-concrete>.

¹³ McLemore, interview.

¹⁴ Virginia House, "L. Latane Trice Bridge," Virginia Acts of Assembly 1996 Session, Chapter 523, House Bill 1533, Approved April 1st, 1996.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Runaway String Band, "The Old Walkerton Bridge," on *Down the River I Go*, June 14th, 2010.

Photographs:

Hand operated cable ferry on the river - Oklawaha River, Florida. 1902. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/28432>.

Jones, Marian. *Walkerton Bridge Photograph (Color) Taken in the 1990's*. Photographs of the Walkerton Bridge. Box 65, Folder 28. King and Queen Tavern Museum, King and Queen County.

Kasper, Gus. *Walkerton Bridge*. Photograph. June 18th, 2021.

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

SAVE THE DATES

ANNUAL PICNIC POSTPONED

The King William County Historical Society Board decided at the March Board meeting to postpone the Annual Meeting and Picnic until October 17th. At that time, the Board was not sure if an in-person meeting could be held in July or, even if we could, whether members would feel safe in attending.

The picnic will be held at Retreat which was built in Mangohick by the Fox family in 1808. Watch for more details in the next newsletter.

*The King William Museum is now closed for
renovations.*

*Located at 227 Horse Landing Road,
King William, Virginia*



History is a lively abode, full of surprises.

Erik Larson

