

KING WILLIAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly Newsletter
October 2021

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October 17, 2021 Membership Meeting Postponed

The Board of the Historical Society has decided to postpone the membership meeting planned for October 17, 2021, due to concerns over rising numbers of Covid cases. We hope to move this meeting at Retreat to July, 2022. We will keep you posted.



Field crew excavating at the potential Tavern site – see p. 4

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello Friends,

We are entering this fall season with a renewed sense and a positive outlook for what can be accomplished. While we have had to postpone our October Membership meeting to a later date, we hope to return to a new normal soon. When I was elected as your president one of my goals was to collaborate with some of the other historical societies around us to exchange event information and create educational opportunities. It is my sincere hope that once the King William Historical Society Museum re-opens, we can plan a history open house with some of our neighboring counties' historical societies such as West Point, King and Queen, Essex, New Kent and Middlesex. These historical society board members have also expressed the same willingness to keep us informed of their efforts and events. As you may recall, we had a joint meeting planned with the West Point Historical Society in April of 2020 when the Pandemic first arrived in our area. We hope to be able to reschedule the meeting with the West Point Historical Society as well as our October 2021 Membership Meeting. It is my belief that our historical organizations can collaborate to offer a more complete understanding of our past as a source of inspiration for our future.

The membership was recently polled and based on the feedback received by the KWCHS Board, we need to postpone the King William County Historical Society meeting planned at the Rhoads' home "Retreat" due to the rise in Covid cases. It is my hope that we will be able to re-schedule this meeting and picnic to July of 2022. In the meanwhile, please check out the archaeological dig sponsored by the King William Historic Society that is underway at the Colonial Courthouse. I hope we can all meet again soon. Please enjoy the fall and stay well.

Best Regards,

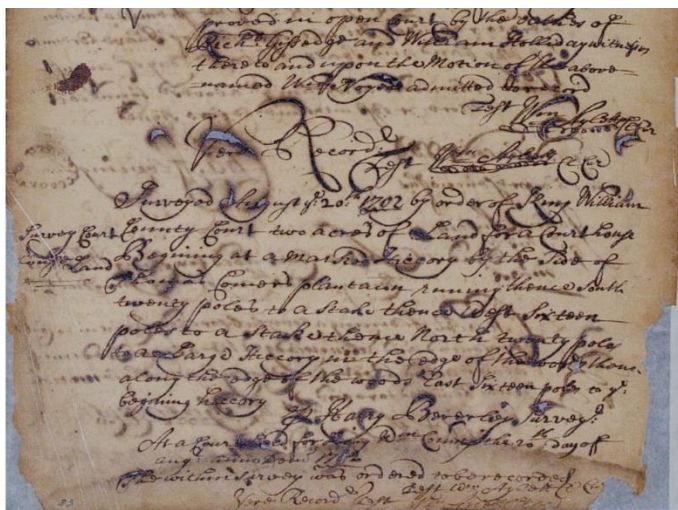
Sally W. Pearson, President, King William County Historical Society



A copper alloy button with a royal Tudor figure, likely from the 18th century, found during excavations at the Courthouse area – see p. 4

MEMBER NEWS

Searching the Newly Transcribed County Records – Book 1



[Marginal note: Survey Court house Land]

Surveyed August 20th 1702 by order of King William County Court two acres of Land for a Courthouse Beginning at a marked Hickory by the Side of Thomas Comer's plantacon runing thence South twenty poles to a Stake thence West Sixteen poles to a Stake thence North twenty poles to a Large Hickory in the edge of the woods thence along the edge of the wood East Sixteen poles to y^e beginning hickory.

Per Harry Beverley Survey^r

At a Court held for King W^m County the 20th day of Aug^r Anno Domⁱ 1702
(The within survey was ordered to be recorded.)

Test W^m Aylett C^l C^m
Vere Record Test W^m Aylett C^l C^m

We are proud that the first of 19 record books for King William County are transcribed and fully keyword searchable. Even better, your purchase of a thumb drive with the secure PDF goes to support the King William County Museum. Just in case you're wondering why this version is so invaluable, here are a couple of quick points. First, the transcription is done page by page, word by word, letter by letter, accurately portraying the original. Don't believe us? Well, you can compare it for yourself because we include an image of each original page opposite the transcription. Second, the ease of searching the book is remarkable and can lead to immediate discoveries. For instance, our recent excavations at the King William County Courthouse include a detailed analysis of the landscape around this remarkable landmark. Historians and archaeologists are working together to build on prior published research and uncover new details that will drive our research questions as excavations continue. A quick search of "Courthouse" reveals a handful of references, including the original deed for the courthouse property signed on August 20, 1702, and a subsequent deed on January 21st that references where the "courthouse now stands."

This courthouse is, of course, our earlier courthouse and not the current one, but it is remarkable for the documentation of its specific period of construction and helps us understand the expediency of its erection. This is one of a handful of discoveries that are truly remarkable and you can only imagine what you might find when you type in your family's name, or the creek where they lived, or any number of words that will help you with your research. It'll not only find the documents where your ancestor was a grantor (or a grantee) but also where they were a neighbor, a witness, or simply referenced in the document. This will help any researcher anxious to work through a book cover-to-cover, with nary a single needle missed in this giant haystack.

– David Brown

Each copy costs \$50 with the proceeds supporting the King William County Museum. For purchase, please email kwhs@kingwilliamhistory.org.

MEMBER NEWS

Fascinating Discoveries Uncovered in Archaeological Digs at the Courthouse

Over the last two months archaeologists have returned to the historic courthouse about one day each week to slowly continue the search for the tavern site, despite the resurgence of the pandemic. At the same time, they have entered the clerk's office to begin the cultural landscape reconstruction of the larger historic district, learning about the buildings, people, and events that helped define this area as a distinct community since at least its origins in the early 18th century. What they've found so far, in the ground and in the documents, have been fascinating and suggest that this area is both rich in history and a wonderful resource from which we can learn many things about our shared past.

On the archaeology side, the major takeaways from the first handful of days have been 1) the remarkable integrity of the archaeological site, and 2) the variety and quality of the material culture. Most sites in Virginia have been somewhat disturbed by the plow as so much of our county was converted from forest to field (and back to forest) sometimes as close as twenty feet to our homes. But the area west of the historic courthouse (the subject of this year's excavation) appears to have escaped that fate, and some of our most remarkable finds are within inches of the surface. Those finds have represented a diverse array of high-quality ceramics befitting of the most elite taverns in the colony. While the artifacts we find are mere fragments of the originals, and their value largely lies in what we can learn from them, they do evoke images of fine dining and tea drinking in the years immediately preceding the American Revolution. Finds include Chinese porcelain, tin-glazed earthenware (delft), Whieldon-type refined earthenwares (including "cauliflower-ware"), Jackfield, Black Basalt, white salt-glazed stoneware, and much, much more found in various vessel forms including plates, tea bowls, tea cups, saucers, punch bowls, and potentially tea pots and coffee pots, too. Not to be outdone, other artifacts include various personal items of the period (buttons, cufflinks, buckles, etc.), wine bottle and case bottle glass, and large amounts of hand-made brick, window glass, cut and wrought nails, and oyster shell-based mortars.

These excavations have uncovered a one-brick-wide foundation from the 18th century, suggesting a building at the edge of the current forest, but only scant evidence of wider foundations that would have been more suitable for a two-story tavern that we know was on the site in the 1770s. While the search continues (look to our Facebook/Twitter/Instagram accounts for upcoming dig days you can visit), we're hopeful they can confirm the original tavern site - but we're pleased as punch(bowls) at what they've found so far.

Work within the records room has proven equally interesting and has only scraped the surface so far. While many of our county's records were burned in the 1885 fire, the 20th-century deeds, wills, and plats are full of interesting information that has helped us better understand the recent and distant past. So far, they've confirmed that two ice house pits, found by the archaeologists closer to the new courthouse, were actually discovered by surveyors (and known to many locals) back in the 1990s. Further to the north in the ravine behind the administration building is an ice pond dam that was surveyed in around the same period, highlighting how important it was for sites like this to have ice stored for cold drinks and other needs throughout the year. We've also found the original agreement for the erection of our fire tower in the 1930s and the construction documents for the "new" Rt. 30 when it replaced the Courthouse Road. Research will continue in the months to come, and we will reach out to the membership to share the discoveries, ask for their input, and hopefully find out new things that will excite all of us about our shared history.

– David Brown, Fairfield Foundation, Inc.



The base of a 19th century whiteware cup with a strange set of numbers and letters not yet identified; German Westerwald and English creamware fragments – see p. 4

Minutes of the King William County Historical Society Membership Meeting
Sunday, July 18, 2021

The Membership Meeting of the King William County Historical Society was held at 2:30 p.m. on Sunday, July 18, 2021 at the Administration Building on the King William Courthouse grounds. There were approximately 25 members and guests present.

President Sally Pearson called the meeting to order at 2:35 p.m. and welcomed members and guests.

Sally Pearson shared news about the activities taking place related to the Historical Society.

- A transcriber is needed to transcribe Deed Books 2 and 3.
- Suggestions for subjects for historical markers within King William are requested.
- A new Recording Secretary is needed.
- Annual dues are now due.
- The next membership meeting is on October 17th at Retreat. A picnic is planned in addition to viewing the historic property.
- The Society continues to support archaeological studies in the Old Courthouse area. Plans are underway for excavations in August and September.

THE KING WILLIAM LOOKOUT TOWER

Minutes, cont'd

Chris Harris shared details about the museum renovations, underway now. New flooring is being installed throughout the museum. New wood shelving is being installed in the research room. A new exhibit is in the works; the subject is a colonial tavern.

Ron Parker gave the Treasurer's report:

<u>Account</u>	<u>Balance</u>
Checking	\$*57,829.47
Museum Savings CD	\$11,496.21
Wells Fargo Museum Fund	\$179,508.61
<u>Total</u>	\$248,834.29

*Checking Account includes \$46,555.19 in Coon Grant Funds.

John Breeden introduced speaker Mark Greenhough who gave an engaging presentation on "How Justice Grew." He explored the influence of county courts, local courthouses, and court day traditions in shaping the lives of Virginians for many generations. Judges, sheriffs, clerks, and lawyers played their roles in rural communities. The architecture of courthouses and their immediate surroundings helped to shape the public events associated with them. The meeting adjourned at 3:50. Refreshments were served.

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THE KING WILLIAM FIRE TOWER

By Gus Kasper

Located just north of the courthouse on Route 30 is a one-hundred-foot-tall steel structure, towering far above the tree tops (Newlin, Email to author, September 27th, 2021). Perhaps at first glance one might assume it is just another cellphone tower like the dozens which dot the rural Virginia skyline. But this tower predates those type of soaring structures by decades, having been built in 1933-34 (Newlin, 2021). This particular structure is in fact a lookout tower, also known as a fire tower.

In the days before cell phones, most any long-distance communication experienced a time lag; one could not simply call the fire department to inform them of a house fire or controlled-burn gone wrong. For this reason, many fires could get out of control very easily, causing property damage and even posing a threat to local citizens.

One of the most devastating forest fires in history was the Great Fire of 1910 which consumed millions of acres of land and even killed 85 people; this disaster set in motion the drive for greater fire safety and prevention methods, including the erection of lookout towers (Forest Service, USDA, n.d.). Many early lookout towers were constructed of wood and were very primitive in design. In 1928, however, Virginia had its first 80-foot steel tower erected in Spotsylvania County (Forest Service, USDA, 1928). During the Great Depression, Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) helped erect many lookout towers; 611 were constructed by the late 1930's (Forest Service, USDA, n.d.). These towers, through instant communication devices such as the radio, enabled firemen to become aware of fires before they spread out of control. However, most lookout towers, including the one in King William, have long since been abandoned.

THE KING WILLIAM FIRE TOWER

There were several reasons why most lookout towers fell into disuse, one reason being that fire reporting technology rapidly advanced in the latter half of the 20th century with the widespread adoption of first home phones and then cell phones. Additionally, towers were expensive to man, and human observers were “often viewed as the weak link in the system” anyway (Omi, 2005: 185-6).

The King William lookout tower was given to the County in May of 2009 by the Virginia Department of Forestry. Many of these structures have been pulled down over the years for various reasons including vandalism, maintenance costs, and the inherent dangers they pose to potential trespassers (Furlow 1993, 15). Lookout towers are becoming an increasingly rare sight these days, so next time you happen to be traveling on Route 30, take a look!



Bibliography:

- Forest Service, USDA.1928. *Forest Worker* 4, No. 4 (July): 4.
- Forest Service, USDA. n.d. “Fire Tower History.” History of Fire Tower Lookout and Cabin Rentals. Accessed September 16th, 2021. https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r1/recreation/?cid=fsp5_030804
- Furlow, Edward P. 1993. “Virginia’s Fire Tower Heritage.” *Virginia Forests* 48, (winter): 14-8
- Newlin, Lora. DOF. Emails to author concerning information contained in the closed-database FAACS. September 27, 2021.
- Omi, Philip N. 2005. *Forest Fires: A Reference Handbook*. Denver Colorado: ABC-CLIO.

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:

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King William, VA 23086

SUGGEST A HIGHWAY MARKER

As mentioned in the July newsletter, 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.

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, including all of the ones we already have in King William. <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/highway-markers/>

Our deadline for suggestions is October 31. Please email suggestions 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!

*The King William Museum is closed for renovations.
Located at 227 Horse Landing Road,
King William, Virginia*



I shall always be grateful for this curious love of history, allowing me to spend a lifetime looking back into the past, allowing me to learn from these large figures about the struggle for meaning for life.

Doris Kearns Goodwin

